UNDERSTANDING PRINCIPALS' KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

Whitney G. Schexnider

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction

Boise State University

August 2021

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the dissertation submitted by

Whitney G. Schexnider

Dissertation Title: Understanding Principals' Knowledge of Special Education

Date of Final Oral Examination: 23 April 2021

The following individuals read and discussed the dissertation submitted by student Whitney G. Schexnider, and they evaluated their presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

Kelly Cross, Ed.D.	Co-Chair, Supervisory Committee
Julianne A. Wenner, Ph.D.	Co-Chair, Supervisory Committee
Jeremy W. Ford, Ph.D.	Member, Supervisory Committee
Keith Thiede, Ph.D.	Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the dissertation was granted by Kelly Cross, Ed.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The dissertation was approved by the Graduate College.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to each and every adult and child with a disability I have had the chance to support and teach. I have learned something about myself and the world through each and every one of you, and wouldn't be where I am today without the trust of you and your families. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Heath, Amelia, and Grant, the three of you have been patient when I wasn't always there, helpful when I couldn't do it on my own, and encouraging when I needed a nudge. Heath, you have always been steadfast in your support of my schooling adventures, including the early mornings, late nights, and missed family time. I could not have made it through the past three years without your support, encouragement, and love. I love you all so much. Mom and Dad, thank you for making education a priority and giving me the chance to take the long way to figuring out what I want to be when I grow up. I love you both with all of my heart. Dr. Kelly Cross, you have supported me through two degrees, some bumpy days, and many smooth ones. Your guidance and advice have helped me to better understand where I fit in the world of special education and leadership. Thank you for being such a strong mentor and guide on this journey. Dr. Julianne Wenner, Dr. Keith Thiede and Dr. Jeremy Ford, thank you all for taking the time to guide me, support me, and help me to put together a research project that I am proud of. I appreciate the various perspectives you brought to my committee and know this dissertation wouldn't have been the same without your support. Lastly, thank you to Bina and Mike. Bina, you may not have known it, but by taking the time to teach me about autism and how to best help Mike, you changed my life. Mike, I didn't always make you happy, but I have always wanted to make sure you are the best version of yourself so the world could see how amazing you are. I love you both.

ABSTRACT

The percentage of students identified as eligible to receive special education services in the United States has grown from 8.3% in the 1976-77 school year to 14% during the 2018-19 school year (Hussar et al., 2020). Given this level of growth and the myriad of levels of support principals provide for students with disabilities, one would assume that principal preparation programs have adjusted their curriculum to ensure future school administrators are prepared to support every student, including those with disabilities. The purpose of this research study is to better understand how current school administrators learned special education-related information for their role, what they believe are the most important aspects of special education, and to identify how background, experience, and self-efficacy play a role in principals' skills related to their role as their building's special education leader. A web-based survey was used to gather information from current school administrators working in Idaho's P-12 school districts. Results of this study show that the majority of Idaho's school administrators are learning special education-related knowledge and skills on the job and through professional development, rather than as part of their principal preparation programs. Recommendations are made to enhance the learning opportunities in both principal preparation programs as well as in-service professional development to develop strong, supportive, school-based special education leaders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCSSO	Council of Chief State School Officers
EAHCA	Education for All Handicapped Children Act
EBP	Evidence-Based Practice
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual Education Program
IHE	Institute of Higher Education
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISDE	Idaho State Department of Education
ISLLC	Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium
LEA	Local Education Agency
NCPEA	National Council of Professors of Educational Administration
NELP	National Educational Leadership Preparation
NPBEA	National Policy Board for Educational Administration
PBL	Problem-Based Learning
PD	Professional Development
PSEL	Professional Standards for Educational Leaders
SDI	Specially Designed Instruction
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
SWD	Students with Disabilities

UCEA   University Council of Educational Administration

CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The role of the school principal is multi-faceted. Often within one school day, principals may move from instructional leader to disciplinarian, from manager to counselor, from peacemaker to problem solver. Threaded throughout these experiences are interactions with different students and teachers, some of whom may be associated with the school's special education program. Although this subgroup within the school is typically small (approximately 14% of the school population; Hussar et al., 2020), the school principal may spend quite a bit of their time supporting students with disabilities (SWD): attending meetings to determine special education eligibility and to develop Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), consulting with district-level special education administrators, supporting special education teachers in their collaboration and instructional practices, communicating with parents, and helping general educators build understanding and partnerships with their special education team members. The percentage of students identified as eligible to receive special education services in the United States has grown from 8.3% in the 1976-77 school year to 14% during the 2018-19 school year (Hussar et al., 2020). Given this level of growth and the myriad of levels of support principals provide for SWD, one would assume that principal preparation programs have adjusted their curriculum to ensure future school administrators are prepared to support every student, including those with disabilities.

With a focus on the roles and responsibilities of a school principal, institutes of higher education (IHEs) provide an opportunity for learning and a path to licensure

through principal preparation (also known as educational leadership) programs. Although

these programs have been in place for over a century, it has only been within the last 70

years that groups such as the National Council of Professors of Educational

Administration (NCPEA) and the University Council for Educational Administration

(UCEA) have provided guidance on the content, practices, and coursework for

educational leadership programs (Willower & Forsyth, 1999). The knowledge and skills

taught in educational leadership programs primarily focus on the role of the school

principal as a leader of all students and yet there is limited attention given to leadership of

the school's special education program or understanding the intent of special education.

For the most part, guidance for future principals has focused on "school law,

administrative requirements, and procedures" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 5) with

relation to the general education setting, leaving out the bigger picture of improving

outcomes for students with disabilities as a whole.

Students with Disabilities in the Public School Setting

In the early 20th century, students with physical or intellectual disabilities were

often institutionalized and did not have access to public education (Pazey & Yates, 2012).

It was not until the 1950s, with the landmark civil rights case *Brown v. Board of

Education* (1954), that segregation of students was found unconstitutional and denied

students equal access to their education (Yell et al., 1998). Although this case was

focused on desegregation of schools based on race, doors began to (slowly creep) open

for students with physical and intellectual disabilities and their ability to begin to access

the same educational setting as their peers (Osborne & Russo, 2021). Additionally, due to

a new emphasis on providing instruction based on individual student needs (for all

students) and tremendous efforts of parents who worked to have their children with disabilities educated in public education (Yell et al., 1998), schools began to provide space for SWD in their buildings (Pazey & Yates, 2012). This didn't automatically equate to meaningful educational opportunities, though. While SWD were given space in schools, they were not necessarily afforded access to the same level of education, content, and curriculum that their typically-developing peers were provided (Pazey & Yates, 2012).

Almost 20 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (further referred to as *Brown*), two additional cases were heard in federal court, paving the way for future legislation with regard to the rights of SWD to access learning in the public school setting. The 1972 case, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (further referred to as *PARC*), addressed SWD access to public education and right to due process. As a result of this case, the precedent was set that districts cannot exclude a child from public education due to the nature of their disability, placement in the general education setting should be considered prior to placement in the special education setting, and that districts must have a process for a hearing or notice related to SWD in the school setting. Also in 1972, *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* (further referred to as *Mills*) addressed exclusion of SWD from public school due to the nature or severity of their disability, as well as the district's response to the court that they did not have adequate funding to serve all SWD within their boundaries. While these cases helped to further strengthen the argument that SWD should be provided access to a public education, they did not necessarily address the quality of content or curriculum SWD would be learning.

With the passing of Public Law 92-142 (more commonly known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act or EAHCA) in 1975, students with disabilities were given the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). As a result of this law, students with disabilities had the right to specially designed instruction to meet their unique needs, at no cost to parents, as part of an individualized education program (EAHCA, 1975). This was a first step in ensuring SWD were provided instructional support that meets their individualized needs. In order to provide FAPE to SWD, states were given the opportunity to apply for federal funds, the receipt of which required them to develop and submit a state-level plan that would outline the supports and services implemented as a result of the funding (Yell et al., 1998). Over a period of 15 years, the EAHCA was reauthorized three times, adding additional protections for students, parents, and school districts related to accessing education for students with disabilities.

In 1982, the United States Supreme Court heard the *Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley* (further referred to as *Rowley*) case. Amy Rowley, the student with a disability at the center of the case, was denied an interpreter in the school setting. The district claimed that with the support of hearing aids, she was able to learn as well as her peers without the use of an interpreter. This case "established the standard of review" to ensure a student's IEP complies with the law and goes beyond merely providing access to a public education (Hachiya et al., 2014, p. 35). *Rowley* also established that SWD should be afforded "an opportunity to achieve full potential commensurate with the opportunity provided to other children" (Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley, 1982). As a result of this case, school districts

needed to provide supports to SWD that demonstrated high expectations and access to instruction and supports that would allow them to succeed.

Further strengthening the foundation established by the EAHCA and *Rowley*, another United States Supreme Court case that influenced the implementation of special education services was *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (further referred to as *Endrew F.*). This case focused on Endrew's lack of access to high-quality instruction that was designed to meet his unique needs. The outcome of *Endrew F.* set an expectation that public school districts provide more than *de minimis*, or the minimum, education to SWD. Districts are responsible for the development and implementation of IEPs that are "reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances" (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, 2017). The *Rowley* and *Endrew F.* rulings were (and continue to be) important decisions in the field of special education, as they set forth the expectation that regardless of the student's capacity for learning, districts and schools will provide high-quality instruction, that meets individual student needs, and sets high expectations for SWD (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, 2017; Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley, 1982).

In 1990, Congress renamed the EAHCA the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and reaffirmed that students with disabilities are entitled to FAPE designed to meet their individual needs (Jimenez & Graf, 2008). The IDEA created a shift in the education of students with disabilities with expectations set that they would be educated with their general education peers to the maximum extent possible. As a result of the IDEA, it was expected that students with disabilities were provided exposure to

content, activities, and peers in the general education environment and principals now held more responsibility in ensuring their school meets each student's individual needs (Jimenez & Graf, 2008; Pazey & Yates, 2012). During this time, when the majority of students with disabilities in schools were spending 80% or more of their school day in their general education classrooms (Pazey & Yates, 2012), conversations began to shift in principal preparation programs in that faculty recognized they would need to provide "enhanced training across the complementary disciplines of general and special education administration" (Pazey & Yates, 2012, p. 33) in order to ensure school principals had the necessary knowledge to support all students in their buildings.

Special education programs continue to be a complex component of the school system today and the principal's role is adapting along with it. Bateman and Bateman (2014) refer to the school principal as the "chief advocate for special education" (p. 9), and identify nine themes that align to this title:

1. The principal is responsible for the education of all students in the school.
2. The principal needs to be familiar with the concept and practice of special education.
3. The principal needs to ensure that staff members know what is necessary for providing special education services.
4. The principal needs to verify that all staff members are appropriately implementing services for students with disabilities.
5. The principal should lead efforts for data collection.
6. The principal should ensure that all staff members are aware of the process for identifying students with disabilities.
7. The principal must be prepared to lead meetings related to services for students with disabilities.
8. The principal needs to know all students in the building and be ready to talk about them.
9. The principal needs to know how to prevent discipline problems (p. 4).

According to McLaughlin (2009), strong special education programs in public schools include the opportunity for SWD to engage in and access the general education

curriculum in a meaningful way. Strong programs also ensure IEPs are developed based on general education content standards to assist students in moving toward grade level, a schoolwide approach to positive behavior supports and discipline is used, and the school culture welcomes and includes communication and partnership with parents of SWD (McLaughlin, 2009). For principals who are unfamiliar with special education or have only a basic understanding of the procedural aspects of the IDEA, it is unlikely that SWD will be able to fully access and benefit from the education they are entitled to.

Special Education Administrator as Primary Support

Historically, special education support and guidance have come from the school district office rather than from school-based administrators (Patterson et al., 2000). As SWD began to enter the public school system in higher numbers in the 1950s (Pazey & Yates, 2012), principals were not prepared to support them. This led districts to identify individuals who had knowledge of vocational skill development and an understanding of the challenges and necessary support for individuals with behavioral needs and "mental hygiene factors" (Pazey & Yates, 2012, p. 22) to provide support and guidance to special educators in schools. These individuals, who eventually became the special education administrators, were typically district-level employees, often previously general education teachers or school psychologists (Boscardin & Lashley, 2012), and were most often seen as both consultants and a primary source of support for students with disabilities. As secondary sources of support, school principals were often expected to identify a location for special education services to take place within their buildings, while the special education administrators addressed instructional needs and support (Pazey & Yates, 2012). Though students with disabilities were accessing the same public

school setting as their general education peers, they were not truly receiving an individualized education or being instructed using general education content standards. These rights would not be granted to them until two decades later with the development of the EAHCA.

Problem Statement

It is important that principal preparation programs not only provide instruction related to the role of supporting all students, but spend time focused on the ever-growing population of students with disabilities in P-12 schools. The limited time and content principal preparation programs spend specifically on the needs of special education programs and the role of the principal as a special education leader impacts principals' ability to effectively support their special education teams. Ramirez (2006) found that when school principals are more knowledgeable about special education laws and procedures, their attitudes toward inclusion of SWD are "more favorable" (p. 83). This may lead to an overall more inclusive environment for SWD in school buildings. In circumstances where special education-specific content is included in principal preparation programs, completers indicate their programs were effective and sufficiently prepared them to support SWD (Johnston & Young, 2019).

In order to understand how principal preparation programs can better prepare future principals for their role as special education leaders, this study has gathered information from current school administrators in the state of Idaho. The information gathered provides data regarding the special education knowledge and skills current school principals and assistant principals have and how they learned the information, what current principals and assistant principals believe are the most important aspects of

special education, and to identify how background, experience, and self-efficacy impact principals' and assistant principals' skills related to special education. The following research questions will be explored in this study:

- How are school principals and assistant principals most likely to learn the knowledge and skills associated with their role in special education-related activities?

- What do current principals and assistant principals identify as the most important things to know about special education in order to be an effective school leader?

- How do demographic factors and reported self-efficacy relate to how current principals and assistant principals perform on special education-based scenarios?

The answers to these questions may assist program coordinators and professors of principal preparation programs to better prepare future principals and assistant principals for the role of supporting their most complex students. Further, these answers may provide IHEs with information regarding important special education concepts that are currently missing from principal preparation programs. The results of this study may also provide guidance to state-level policy makers who determine the standards that school principals need to meet in order to support all students in the public school setting. Finally, the knowledge and content areas most often excluded from principal preparation programs may be future areas of professional development for in-service school principals and assistant principals.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is important to understand how support for SWD has evolved over the past 70 years and how instruction for and the role of the school principal has shifted with these changes. While some principal preparation programs have included content to assist principals in understanding how to support students who access special education services, there is not enough instructional or experiential focus on the specific components of the special education process, how to support their special education teams, and to adequately prepare principals for their role as special education leaders.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the current literature with regard to how principals are prepared to be school leaders and the role of school principals as part of the special education process. The chapter begins with a look at the development and incorporation of leadership standards as guidance for principal preparation programs. Second, a review of how principals are prepared for their role as special education leaders and how that preparation can result in increased principal self-efficacy. Next, state certification requirements will be reviewed, which set the tone for principal leadership in the state of Idaho. Finally, the knowledge and skills school principals need to know in order to be active leaders of their school's special education program is reviewed, how their knowledge (or lack thereof) impacts special education teacher attrition and retention, how principals influence the instruction of SWD, and how the supervision and evaluation of special education teachers is impacted as a result of a lack of special education knowledge will be discussed.

Preparing Principals to be Special Education Leaders

Across the country, IHEs are providing future principals with the critical concepts, skills, and experiences related to the role of the school leader. Programs often focus on leadership theory, finance/budgeting, educational law, curriculum, and instruction with only some attention given to the topic of special education (Alkin, 1992; Hofreiter, 2017; McHatton et al., 2010; Zaretsky et al., 2008). In the mid-20th century, school principals "were trained to develop a common curriculum through equal interventions or treatments" (Pazey & Yates, 2012, p. 22). While consistency in instruction for public school students was the norm at the time, that did not bode well for students with disabilities. This type of guidance and training meant that it was not common practice to individualize instruction and meet the needs of each and every student in a different way. Sirotnik and Kimball (1994) went as far as to say that special education "is treated wholly inadequately, if at all, in programs designed to prepare school administrators" (p. 598).

The focus of school leadership has evolved from an emphasis on the management of people in the early 1900s to the production of change and support in present day (Northouse, 2016). Since the 1980s, the shift from manager to instructional leader has been a cornerstone of many educational leadership programs, especially with changes to the responsibilities of school principals and more emphasis on curriculum, instruction, decision-making, and team development (McCarthy, 1999).

School Leadership Standards

Although programs that prepare future school leaders have been in place since the early 1900s (Alkin, 1992), school leadership standards themselves are relatively new,

with the development of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards in 1996 and their first update in 2008. The ISLLC standards were again updated and approved in 2015, this time as the Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL). These standards provide states with "high-level guidance and insight about the traits, functions of work, and responsibilities they will ask of their school and district leaders" (Wilhoit, 2008, p. 5).

For the purpose of this study, curriculum is defined by Osterman and Hafner (2009) "as the 'what' of a given course or classroom interaction or the content of a particular educational endeavor" (p. 270). In lieu of a standard set curriculum for educational leadership programs, IHE program coordinators have access to standards developed by stakeholder and nonprofit groups whose intention is to provide some level of foundation for principal preparation programs. Developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the UCEA, and the NPBEA, the 2018 National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards identify "what novice leaders and preparation program graduates should know and be able to do" (NPBEA, 2018, p. 3). The NELP standards provide IHEs with a framework for the design of principal preparation programs and identify content and skills principal candidates should know and be able to demonstrate upon completion of the program (NPBEA, 2018). As part of the NELP guidance, there are eight building-level standards that should influence content covered in principal preparation programs. These standards include skills related to development and support for the school's mission, vision, and culture, professional development and community-building with staff, students, and families, support for curriculum, instruction and assessment practices, and management of school operations and improvement

(NPBEA, 2018). While these standards address the major skills needed to be an effective school principal, they do not specifically identify content that should be covered that relates to special education supports or leadership of special education teams. The Building-Level NELP standards include information on knowledge and practices that discuss inclusion within Standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness (NPBEA, 2018). This standard expects future administrators to understand how to build and maintain a school culture that supports inclusive practices using up-to-date research as a guide, understand the importance of and demonstrate equitable practices that allow all students to learn and grow, and be able to analyze their school's own practices to increase equitable instruction and learning (NPBEA, 2018). An understanding of how to build an inclusive school community is important, but little change will be made when there is limited focus on better understanding the complexity of the special education process, the instructional needs of students with disabilities, and the supervision/evaluation of special education teachers. The 2015 update of the PSEL indicates that "educational leaders must focus on how they are promoting the learning, achievement, development and well-being of each student" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3). This statement is important, as the role of the school principal includes supporting *all* students, including those identified as students with disabilities.

In their review of over 400 articles on educational leadership programs (with a focus on written, supported, taught, and learned curriculum), Osterman and Hafner (2009) found that the curriculum within principal preparation programs was lacking a systematic focus in relation to written curriculum and that there is much more work to do in identifying the taught curriculum in principal preparation programs. In part, this

difficulty with identification of a standard curriculum for principal preparation programs is related to the variety of foci in programs across the country (Osterman & Hafner, 2009).

Principal Preparation Program Components

Without a consistent set of requirements that include special education-related topics, policies, and procedures, each principal preparation program takes a different approach in educating future school administrators. DeMatthews and Edwards (2014) suggest that principal preparation programs spend more attention updating their coursework and include faculty from across educational disciplines (including special education) as they review current research on how school administrators impact special education in the school setting. They noted four specific areas of concern that should be updated, including coursework that does not align with the role of principal nor keep up with changes in the field, the gap between theory and practice that does not typically include special education, a lack of special education experiences by program faculty (due to more emphasis on research and less on experience, in many cases), and clinical experiences that vary dramatically between programs (DeMatthews & Edwards, 2014). With regard to clinical experiences, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) criticized principal preparation programs for the "set of ad hoc projects" (p. 6) assigned to students that do not provide real-life experiences and problems in service principals encounter on a daily basis.

In their study of highly effective principal preparation programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) found that programs in which coursework and field work were interwoven and allow for problem-based learning related to candidates' internship

experiences provides a more realistic leadership experience. Specific to special education, Johnston and Young (2019) found that close to 47% of in-service principals reported that they felt prepared to serve as special education leaders without fieldwork that connected their coursework to experiences. This number rose to just over 60% for those who had a year or more of internship or clinical experience in their principal preparation programs (Johnston & Young, 2019). The link between coursework and internship experiences becomes more powerful when intentional connections are made by the principal preparation program. The five highly-effective principal preparation programs studied by Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) provided candidates with the opportunity to have "authentic, active learning experiences" (p. 65) in which they were able to work alongside experienced principals who provided opportunities to experience the role of a school administrator in a way that was truly meaningful, rather than as part of a project or isolated activity. The intentionality of these programs could also create situations in which the candidates have experiences with students who access special education services and special education team members who need guidance and/or support in order to fulfill their roles.

Principal Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura (1977) began the conversation of self-efficacy and identified that how strongly an individual feels about their skills can impact whether they not only initiate a task and whether or not they persist (and for how long) if the task is difficult. This was a shift from the behaviorist perspective that the outcome of a behavior, or the consequence, is the primary reason for an individual continuing (or not continuing) to exhibit the behavior in the future (Driscoll, 2000). Self-efficacy is considered "context

specific" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, p. 573); a school principal may have higher

self-efficacy for general education instructional leadership, but lower self-efficacy for

special education instructional leadership because of the absence of any requisite special

education content in principal preparation programs (Fisher, 2014; Skaalvik, 2020). This

may impact principals' engagement with special educators and their motivation to

prioritize provision of feedback or instructional guidance (Skaalvik, 2020). In order to

help future principals approach similar situations with their special education team with

the same level of confidence they have with general education counterparts, it is

important for principal preparation programs to provide opportunities to practice special

education-related skills in meaningful ways.

When school principals have previous experience as certified special educators,

they report higher levels of self-efficacy compared to principals who do not have special

education experience (Marek, 2016). Individuals who were previously certified as special

education teachers have practical experience implementing the IDEA and likely

understand the process at a deeper level than school principals who learned components

of special education law and implementation of the IDEA as part of their principal

preparation program.

When given the chance to practice special education-related skills while in their

principal preparation programs, there may be less threat for future school principals

(because the stakes are not as high) than if their first time observing a special educator or

participating in a difficult parent meeting occurs while on the job. It is likely that the

more confidence the principal has that they can master a special education-related skill

(such as providing meaningful feedback, leading a difficult IEP team meeting discussion,

etc.), the less threatening the situation may be when it occurs in the day-to-day job (Bandura, 1977). In a study completed by Marek (2016), it was found that self-efficacy of school principals increases as the number of years of experience supporting special education increases.

<u>State Certification Requirements</u>

In addition to participation in a principal preparation program, future school principals must also demonstrate competence toward state-level administrator standards, which is important as an understanding of the school culture, teachers, students, families and community are critical for successful school leadership (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). All 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted leadership standards, and in the majority of states this approval is completed by the State Board of Education (Education Commission of the States, 2018).

The state of Idaho most recently updated their school administrator standards in July 2020. While the 2019 Idaho Standards for Initial Certification of Professional School Personnel were based on the 2008 ISLLC standards, the Idaho State Board of Education used the 2015 PSEL standards as a basis for the 2020 update. These standards require that all candidates for administrator endorsements demonstrate the understanding of the standards using multiple modes of evidence as a result of their participation in administrator preparation programs (Idaho State Department of Education [ISDE], 2020).

There are ten Idaho Standards for School Principals, each of which includes a set of components that require candidates to demonstrate both knowledge and skills related to the standard (see Appendix A for a full description of each standard). The ten standards include:

- Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Beliefs

- Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms

- Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

- Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students

- Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel

- Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers

- Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

- Standard 9: Operations and Management

- Standard 10: Continuous School Improvement

Although these standards identify the knowledge and skills necessary for principals to support the school as a whole, the role also requires an understanding of both the procedures and implementation of the IDEA. For example, Standard 3 requires that the school principal promote equitable access to education for all students in their school. In order for SWD to have equitable access, they must be given the opportunity to learn and demonstrate understanding of the general education content standards just as their general education peers do. If the school principal does not learn the necessary skills to advocate for SWD to learn in the general education setting and provide resources and supports necessary for teachers and staff to provide the specially designed instruction each SWD requires, it is likely that SWD will not have equitable access to their education. Similarly, Standard 4 focuses on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The school principal must be able to guide implementation of curriculum aligned to state standards, emphasize and support the use of evidence-based instructional practices that

challenge all students, and use assessment data to improve instruction across grade levels. Although strong principal preparation programs emphasize instructional leadership within their coursework and internship activities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010), this general focus does not provide future principals with guidance on evidence-based practices found to support SWD in achieving educational outcomes. Overall, by not including content on understanding the needs, instruction, and support of special populations in the standards, IHEs are given the leeway to focus instead on other areas of the principal's responsibilities. This leaves many new principals in the dark and unprepared about their role as special education leaders.

School Principals and Special Education

It has only been within the past 30 years that school principals have had the primary responsibility of supporting students with disabilities in their schools (Pazey & Yates, 2012). Prior to that time, the responsibility often fell on the shoulders of special education administrators, who may have been supporting multiple schools across a district (Pazey & Yates, 2012).

Principal Understanding of Special Education

At the procedural level, school principals need to understand special education law, acronyms, and the general requirements of the IDEA (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Hofreiter, 2017; Templeton, 2017). This understanding allows administrators to participate in special education processes such as eligibility and IEP team meetings as knowledgeable team members. Knowledge of the requirements of the IDEA will also provide principals with a foundation for understanding their role on the IEP team and what SWD are entitled to in the public school setting. In a survey of 1,500 school

principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia, DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003)

focused on identifying concerns of school principals related to their administrator

preparation program, job-related difficulty, and the shifting role of the principal, among

others. The results of the survey indicated that 90% of respondents identified "special

education law and implementation" as an area of concern related to organizational

management (DiPaola &Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 52). While many principal

preparation programs incorporate special education law into their coursework, they do

not typically focus on other (equally important) areas that directly impact SWD's access

to high-quality instruction (Praisner, 2003).

At a conceptual level, school principals should have the knowledge and skills that

allow them to understand and analyze special education data in order to fully participate

in IEP team decisions (Templeton, 2017). Comprehension of the IDEA beyond the

procedural level can also help principals to understand that this law is in place to support

SWD in their education by providing services and supports that allow them access to the

general education curriculum and instruction, just as their typically-developing peers.

In 2009, Angelle and Bilton completed a study on the comfort level of principals

in supporting special education within school buildings after completing their principal

preparation programs. Of the 215 principals who completed the survey, 53% of

participants reported they did not complete any courses focused on special education

during their principal preparation programs. For those who had at least one course in

special education during their preparation program, the researchers found statistical

significance in the level of principals' comfort in supporting special education (Angelle

& Bilton, 2009). Just one course can help future principals feel more comfortable and

raise self-efficacy with special education components, but researchers suggest it may enhance relevancy to embed content into existing coursework, rather than as a separate course (Angelle & Bilton, 2009). This would allow future principals the opportunity to learn the important concepts, procedures, and requirements of special education in context where it is more meaningful. Students with disabilities are first and foremost general education students, meaning that prior to being found eligible for special education services, they were general education students first and have the right to a high-quality education just as their general education peers do. Teaching future principals the content needed to support SWD within the context of their daily jobs (interacting with all students) may make a difference in their understanding and confidence in the role once they are hired to be a principal. Exposure to special education topics in principal preparation programs supported an overall favorable attitude toward SWD and inclusive practices (Praisner, 2003).

Through development of a curriculum for a principal preparation program in Alabama, Reames (2010) described how the curriculum development committee focused on instruction that included problem-based learning, developing skills through experiences in internship, and having opportunities to encounter realistic experiences of a principal. This instructional focus resulted in participants reporting high levels of engagement in their school community, in principal program coursework, and understanding of "connectivity between every classroom, every school, and every school district" (Reames, 2010, p. 454).

Without proper understanding of special education, principals are more likely to step aside and provide no direction to their teams, rather than guess or ask for district

assistance. Consequently, they cannot effectively advocate for their special education teachers, students, and parents (Patterson et al., 2000). School principals need to understand enough to be supportive and provide guidance within the school, in addition to being able to advocate for the needs of their building (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

Special Education Teacher Attrition and Administrator Support

For many principals who are former general educators, supporting special education teachers may be difficult as the content and instructional strategies for SWD are not as familiar to them as those typically used for students without disabilities. Additionally, a lack of understanding with regard to the special education process, components, and requirements of the IDEA may impact the school principal's ability to adequately support their special educators (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

In a study conducted by Billingsley et al. (2004), 24% of the early career special education teachers surveyed indicated that they believe their principal knows little or nothing about what they do. If the principal is unfamiliar with the requirements and process involved in development and implementation of an IEP, the considerations and steps involved in discipline for students with disabilities, or how to provide opportunities for collaboration with general education partners, they may be less likely to understand what is expected of the special education teachers in their role, which can lead to a lack of proactive support in ensuring the special educator is getting their needs met (Prather-Jones, 2011).

Over the past twenty years, various studies have investigated the impact of principal support on the attrition of special education teachers and found limited

administrator support can lead to special education teachers making the decision to leave the school and/or field of special education (Brownell et al., 1997; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Frost & Kersten, 2011; Prather-Jones, 2011). This can also cause difficulty for schools and districts to consistently implement programs and instruction when there are high rates of special education teacher attrition, especially in rural areas and/or low-performing schools where there are a limited number of qualified candidates to fill positions (Brownell et al., 1997; Edgar & Pair, 2005; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). A school administrator's lack of understanding of instructional needs of SWD, discipline procedures, and paperwork expectations are cited as some of the reasons special educators leave their positions, though overall lack of administrative support was a consistent response across multiple studies (Brownell et al., 1997; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Frost & Kersten, 2011). While these reasons may be why many special educators leave their positions, they can also be reasons to stay. If school principals provide support and understand inclusive practices in special education, recognize the need for SWD to access the general education curriculum to make progress on statewide standards, and support in addressing concerns and issues in special education, special education teachers may feel more supported and remain in their positions (Westling & Whitten, 1996; Waldron, et al., 2011). When principal preparation programs provide exposure to these types of issues (whether through coursework, problem-based learning, internships, etc.), future principals are more prepared to advocate for their special education team and students in the school setting. Brownell et al. (1997) recommend principal preparation programs include instruction and activities that provide future

principals with experiences that allow them to better understand the complexities of teaching students with disabilities.

Though Fore et al. (2002) identify administrator-specific recommendations to reduce special education teacher attrition, they also discuss other areas that can help special educators feel supported. They suggest providing special education teachers with sacred preparation periods, demonstration of an awareness of class/caseload size in relation to the needs of SWD, opportunities for professional development including mentorship with other special education teachers, and providing additional guidance to new special educators so they feel supported from the beginning of their career (Fore et al., 2002). By building a trusting relationship with special education teachers in their buildings, school principals have an opportunity to gain insight on current trends and changes in the field of special education from their special education teachers (Templeton, 2017). The trusting relationship may also impact a special educator's desire to remain in their position. When things get tough, the teacher may take comfort in knowing they are heard, supported, and respected (Nance & Calabrese, 2009).

Instructional Support for Students with Disabilities

In addition to providing support to special education team members, school principals must also understand the special education process in a way that allows them to support and guide their general education teachers as well (Templeton, 2017). Principals must recognize the importance of a SWD's access to general education content and peers to learn skills associated with both formal and hidden curriculums in order to use them as they move through P-12 schooling and beyond. Their understanding of the need for instruction across subject areas and life skills can help IEP teams better plan for

a student's future (Templeton, 2017). Frost and Kersten (2011) studied principals'

perceptions of their role as instructional leaders and found that principals reported that

training on instructional practices and intervention strategies that support SWD would

increase their knowledge as special education leaders in their schools. If principals

understand the evidence-based practices (EBPs) that align with the needs of SWD, are

able to identify whether those practices are being implemented with fidelity, and can help

their teachers better understand the practices through coaching and examples, they may

be able to help their teachers generalize instruction across special and general education

environments (DiPaola & Hoy, 2012).

Principals, as instructional leaders, must ensure all students have access to grade-

level content in order to make adequate progress toward grade level standards. If the

principal does not understand how to support their special education team in identifying

or creating opportunities for SWD to access grade level content, they are less likely to

advocate for their special education program or support their special education team in

providing the necessary services and supports to their students (Thurlow et al., 2012).

When the principal understands the needs of SWD and the importance of accessing their

specially designed instruction (SDI) in the general education setting, they may be more

likely to advocate for collaboration time and professional development of special and

general educators to work together to support SWD as partners. Those collaboration

opportunities could benefit both types of teachers, as well as both general and special

education students.

Supervision and Evaluation of Special Education Teachers

As part of their responsibility as school leaders in the state of Idaho, principals must complete the evaluation cycle for each special (and general) education teacher annually (ISDE, n.d.). Staehr Fenner, Kozik, and Cooper (2015) consider the focus of teacher evaluations "for all students to be supported and experience academic as well as social success" (p. 7). In order for this to occur, school principals need to have knowledge of EBPs in instruction, behavior management techniques, and characteristics of various disabilities (Rodl et al., 2018). When observing special education classrooms, the school principal should have enough information about the students, instructional practices, and differentiation of instruction to effectively evaluate special education teachers. While SWD often receive instruction focused prerequisite skills below their grade level, the school principal should be able to recognize when teachers are not holding students to high expectations and address this issue as part of the supervision and/or evaluation process (Staehr Fenner et al., 2015). The evaluation cycle should involve not only formal evaluation of the teacher but also include ongoing supervision through collaboration between the school principal and the special educator (DiPaola & Hoy, 2012). When principals conduct observations, provide feedback to teachers, and support and encourage teachers to increase their own knowledge and practices, overall teacher practice improves (Bellibas et al., 2020).

Evaluation of special education teachers does not consist solely of observations and a reporting of results. It also requires feedback from the school administrator with a goal to improve special education teacher practice. As part of a study of 929 school administrators in California by Rodl et al. (2018), close to 73% of survey participants

indicated they received instruction on teacher evaluation during their principal preparation programs, but 71.8% of those same individuals did not receive any instruction related to the evaluation of special education teachers (Rodl et al., 2018). School administrators should receive training on the supervision and evaluation of special educators, including "the knowledge and skills demanded of effective special educators" (Steinbrecher et al., 2015, p. 100); an understanding of the procedural aspects of the IDEA is not enough to provide meaningful feedback and guide teacher practice (Bays, 2001). As building leaders, principals should help special educators set personal goals and support their professional development (Sledge, 2014), but will be unable to successfully do so if they are not familiar with and fully understand the EBPs most likely to increase learning and outcomes of SWD (Johnson et al., 2016). If they are knowledgeable about instructional practices in special education, an administrator's feedback and guidance will be much more meaningful.

Summary

Overall, there are multiple areas for educational leadership programs to focus on in order to improve preparation for future school leaders. Although leadership standards were created by stakeholder and educational groups, they do not specifically address special education leadership at the school level. Programs should update coursework to better prepare future principals to be special education leaders. With intentional coursework that focuses on the intent of special education and both procedural and conceptual components of supporting SWD, future principals will be better prepared for their role as special education leaders. In order to support principals in approaching their new role as special education leaders, principal preparation programs need to begin the

process of building self-efficacy by providing opportunities to practice special education-related skills in meaningful ways during coursework and internship activities. For principals already in the field, targeted professional development can supplement knowledge gained on the job.

The state of Idaho requires that all principal candidates demonstrate understanding of the administrator standards using multiple modes of evidence. The lack of emphasis on special education does not ensure future administrators are prepared for their role as special education leaders. In order to effectively lead their schools, principals must understand special education law as well as the purpose of special education, which is to provide access to general education content standards that move SWD closer to their same-age peers. Lack of principal support and leadership are strong factors in why many special education teachers leave their schools or the field of special education (in general). When provided the experiences and information necessary to support their teachers, principals will be more likely to build trusting, collegial relationships with their special education teachers. Principals must also recognize the importance of SWD's access to general education content in order to progress toward state content standards and prioritize that access when working with their general and special education teams. Lastly, special educators require feedback and guidance to grow in their practice. This can only happen when their evaluator is familiar with instructional practices used for SWD and can provide meaningful feedback on teacher practice.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology used to develop a clear picture of how current school principals in Idaho are gaining knowledge and skills related to special education, what they perceive are the most important aspects of special education, and how demographic factors and reported self-efficacy relate to how current principals perform on special education-based scenarios. This mixed methods study includes both quantitative and qualitative components to collect and analyze data, identify themes and patterns as the two types of data are merged, and allow the researcher to "draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both [quantitative and qualitative methods] in single research studies and across studies" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The decision to develop a mixed-methods study has allowed me to gain valuable information regarding the special education-related knowledge and skills of Idaho's school administrators. Data were collected concurrently; quantitative and qualitative data were collected through survey questions, then integrated through data analysis (Creswell, 2009). This form of mixed method research provided an opportunity to gather data from a large pool of participants, which helped to identify patterns of current school principals' knowledge and skills related to special education across the state of Idaho.

This chapter begins with a review of the research questions to be answered as a result of this study. Next, I will describe the survey design, how the pilot study results lead to the final survey design, and how participants were recruited. The procedure for

survey distribution and data collection will be provided. A subjectivity statement will help to clarify my process and experience as a special educator and researcher. The data analysis process will be outlined and finally, validity and quality is addressed.

Research Questions

This study is focused on answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How are school principals most likely to learn the knowledge and skills associated with their role in special education-related activities?

RQ2: What do current principals identify as the most important things to know about special education in order to be an effective school leader?

RQ3: How do demographic factors and reported self-efficacy related to how current principals perform on special education-related scenarios?

Survey Design

A 13-question survey was developed for the purpose of this study (see Appendix B). The survey was designed using feedback from a pilot study group and input from my doctoral committee, in addition to a review of literature that included information regarding principal preparation programs and the principal's role within the special education process (Bateman et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2015; Guzman, 1997; McLaughlin, 2009; Schultz, 2011; Staehr Fenner et al., 2015; Weatherly, 2019).

Survey items asked participants to answer both open and closed-ended questions, use a Likert-style scale, rank order items, and complete two scenario-based questions in order to understand participants' ability to apply their special education-related knowledge and skills. Participants were asked to provide demographic information (gender identification, current administrative position, number of years as a school

administrator, the level of education they work in, and the educational region in which their school is located in Idaho), which provided data that was used as part of the analysis. A multiple-choice question asked participants to identify their previous experience with individuals with disabilities by choosing all options that apply. This question helped to establish the level of experience each participant had in relation to SWD such as: no experience, experience with SWD in their general education class for one or more years, experience as a special educator, knowledge of someone outside of school with a disability, or as the parent of a child with a disability. This information was later used as part of the analysis by reviewing participant responses and scenario answers in relation to self-reported efficacy and their level of experience with individuals with disabilities in and outside of the school setting.

The use of Likert-scale questions gave participants the opportunity to identify the extent (not at all; one or more times per month; one or more times per week; daily) to which they participate in specific special education-related activities in their role as an administrator, how they learned the knowledge/skills associated with those activities (principal preparation program; professional development activities; personal experience outside of school; on the job; have never learned this skill), and how confident they currently feel (not at all; to a very little extent; to some extent; to a great extent) in their ability to participate in the activities. The special education-related activities participants were asked to choose from include:

- actively participating in IEP meetings,

- appropriately disciplining SWD,

- conducting formal observations of special education teachers,

- providing guidance on instructional strategies for SWD, and

- participating in school-based special education staff meetings.

These five items were identified through a review of the literature as knowledge and skills necessary for school administrators to have in order to fully support their special education team and program.

In order to actively participate in IEP meetings, school administrators must have an understanding of the IEP development process and their role with the process and on the IEP team (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al., 2017; Stephens & Nieberding, 2003; Weatherly, 2019). By participating in IEP meetings, school administrators gain a better understanding of a student's instructional and curriculum needs, have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and provide input as the team builds a student's plan, and build trusting relationships with students, staff, and parents (Guzman, 1997; Heron et al., 2003).

To make an "informed decision" (Stephens and Nieberding, 2003, p. 4) and establish a clearly defined process for appropriate discipline of SWD, administrators need to have a clear understanding of the rights and responsibilities of SWD and the school and district legal requirements with regard to student discipline (Bateman et al., 2017; Guzman, 1997; McLaughlin, 2009). Although discipline policy for all students is established at a district level and must be followed, there are differences in the process and procedures for SWD that school administrators must be aware of (Bateman & Bateman, 2014) in order to ensure the rights of SWD are not violated.

An understanding of formal observations of general education teachers is not enough for school administrators to fully understand what special educators are teaching;

they need to understand how to formally observe and evaluate special educators, too (Stephens and Nieberding, 2003). School administrators need to understand the "look-fors" when observing special educators, but may struggle if they are not familiar with how evaluation results and instruction tie to a student's IEP, the use of accommodations, adaptations, and other supports to remove barriers to learning, and overall knowledge of the students and classroom (Staehr Fenner et al., 2015, p. 101).

Knowledge and skills in formal observation also tie to a school principal's ability to provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD. Administrators need to understand what information in the eligibility report is used to identify a student's need for specially designed instruction (SDI) and how those recommended changes to content, methodology, and delivery of instruction influence a student's individualized instruction (Stephens & Nieberding, 2003). A school principal's familiarity with evidence-based practices in special education and strategies for differentiated instruction will offer greater opportunities to have meaningful conversations with teachers about how SWD access the general education curriculum (Schultz, 2011).

Lastly, participation in school-based special education staff meetings provides the school administrator with an opportunity to build trust through "shared decision making" and collaboration (Villa et al., 1996, p. 43), as well as an opportunity to listen to and learn from the special education team, problem-solve, and provide guidance in supporting SWD (Heron et al., 2003). The time spent collaborating, learning from one another, and discussing schoolwide decisions that relate to SWD can help the school principal to better understand the needs of their special education team (Bettini et al., 2015).

The rank-order items question asked participants to identify, as a school administrator, which three items they believe are the most important things to know about special education. The choices, which align to the special education-related activities incorporated into the Likert-scale questions, included components of special education law including timelines and requirements, supervision/evaluation of special education teachers, identifying services and the Least Restrictive Environment, discipline of students with disabilities, how to read and understand an IEP, how to facilitate an IEP meeting, ensuring that all students with disabilities have meaningful access to general education content, how to support special education teachers in their roles, and helping students with disabilities to meet grade-level expectations alongside peers. The responses to this question provide insight into the concepts that are most important as well as least important (those choices that did not make it in participants' top three) to school administrators. They can also be compared to answers to the Likert-style questions and scenario responses and scores.

Scenario-based questions provided participants with a special education-related issue and asked them to identify next steps in addressing the issue. The first scenario presented a situation where the parent of a student called the principal to ask that a student (with a disability) be transferred to another classroom as a result of her disruptive behavior. The scenario requested that the participant explain how they would respond to the parent, what information they would gather, and how they would address the parent's concern with the student's teacher(s). The second scenario described a situation where a student found eligible under the category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD) was making limited progress towards annual IEP goals, teachers were not sure how to support

the student, and parents expressed concern about the purpose of special education. Participants were asked to explain how they would respond to the student's parents and what they would say to the general and special education teachers given their comments regarding the student, his progress, his needs, and his disability. Responses to scenarios were recorded within the survey tool.

Pilot Study

A pilot survey (see Appendix C) was developed to determine whether the questions and response options were clearly stated, easy to understand, gathered data related to the research questions, and would continue to do so for expansion into a statewide study (Dillman et al., 2014). A review of current literature was completed in the areas of principal preparation and the principal's role in special education to establish areas of focus for survey items (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Bateman et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2015; Guzman, 1997; Heron et al., 2003; McLaughlin, 2009; Schultz, 2011; Staehr Fenner et al., 2015; Stephens & Nieberding, 2003; Villa et al., 1996; Weatherly, 2019).

Because target participants for this study are current school principals and vice/assistant principals in the state of Idaho, a convenience sample of 11 former Idaho school principals was used to pilot the survey. The pilot group was contacted via email and provided information regarding the purpose and overall goals of the research, a link to the survey, and a request to provide feedback on the clarity of questions, whether survey questions should include additional options for response, and if there were additional special education-related topics that should be included in the survey. Of the 11 individuals contacted, eight completed the survey.

Survey Refinement

As a result of pilot group survey responses, adjustments were made to survey items and are reflected in the final survey. One of the adjustments was made to the question *How did you learn the knowledge/skills associated with the following special education-related activities? (select all that apply).* In the pilot survey, the item did not include *on the job* as a choice, but *Other* was listed. If pilot study participants chose *Other*, they were then asked to complete a short-answer response to indicate how they learned the information. Of the five short-answer responses to this question, three of the responses indicated the individual learned the skill(s) "on the job" within the survey and one similar response was provided via email from a pilot study participant. Because this was a consistent answer and the same language was used in 50% of responses, the option of *on the job* was added as a choice in the final survey and the choice of *Other* was removed.

Other adjustments were made to the final survey as a result of discussion with my doctoral committee. An additional option was added to the question that asked where participants learned the knowledge/skills associated with (listed) special education-related activities. The option to choose *I have never learned how to do this* was added as a final option. An additional adjustment included aligning all special education-related activities across multiple questions. This allowed me to compare responses to the extent of participation in the activities, how the information pertaining to the activities was learned, and the extent to which the participant feels able to complete the special-education related activities. By better aligning these items, connections can be made and analyzed related to participant responses to each question. Additionally, the pilot survey

requested that participants identify how they currently feel about their special education-related knowledge and skills, without identifying specific topics or activities for participants to consider. This question was removed from the final survey and replaced with the question asking the extent to which the participant feels able to complete the (listed) special education-related activities. Again, the response to this question could be compared to responses on additional questions using the same items to see if the individual's ability to complete the activity aligns with how they learned the content, how often they participate in the activity, and how they responded on the scenario-based questions. The pilot survey did not include scenario-based questions to complete, which was important to include in the final survey in order to compare participant reports of knowledge and experience to their ability to apply that knowledge in a special education-related scenario.

Overall, the pilot survey allowed me to refine the questions within my final survey and ensure the information gathered could be connected across multiple questions for a stronger analysis of the level of knowledge current school administrators have with regard to special education.

Study Participants

Criterion sampling was used to select study participants who are current school principals and vice/assistant principals working in P-12 public school districts in the state of Idaho. While the two roles have different position descriptions, both principals and vice/assistant principals are included in the participant list because both roles require the individual to hold an Idaho Administrator Certificate. The use of criterion sampling ensured the participants met a "predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2002, p.

238). In this study, the participant sample included only individuals who completed a state-approved educational leadership program and hold a current Idaho Administrator Certification, School Principal (PK-12) endorsement. The participant sample excluded principals and vice/assistant principals at public charter schools in Idaho, as the requirements for administrators working at Idaho's public charter schools do not require that all individuals hold an Idaho Administrator Certificate. Excluding administrators at public charter schools from this study ensured that the participant pool only included those individuals who have completed a principal preparation program prior to becoming an Idaho school administrator.

During the 2020-2021 school year there were a total of 156 publicly-funded local education agencies (LEAs) in the state of Idaho. Of those 156 LEAs, 38 are independent, public charter schools and are excluded from this study. Using the State of Idaho website (https://www.idaho.gov/education/school-districts/) as a guide, 114 public school district web pages were reviewed and used to identify the email addresses of each district's school administrators across the six educational regions of the state. There were two situations in which email addresses for multiple school administrators could not be located on the LEA's website. In both situations, the Director of Special Education for the school district was contacted via email and asked if they could provide the additional email addresses and were able to do so. A total of 837 email addresses from current school principal/vice principals in the state of Idaho were gathered for the purpose of this study.

Participant Recruitment

After the school administrator email addresses were compiled, contact was made with each principal via email through Qualtrics Software (a tool used to develop and distribute the survey), Version February, 2021. The initial email to potential participants included a brief description of the purpose of the survey and how results would be used (see Appendix D). The invitation email included a statement that as part of their voluntary participation in the survey, individuals could provide their name and email address to be entered to win one of six $50 Visa gift cards for their school's special education program.

Once the individual clicked on the link to complete the survey, they were taken to the survey cover page (see Appendix E), which provided a more detailed description of the purpose of the research, how results will be used, information about the drawing for a Visa gift card, and contact information for the researcher, faculty advisor, and university Institutional Review Board (IRB).

There were two school districts with an internal research proposal review process, which required district approval prior to completing any research (including survey research) with the district. For each school district requiring the internal research proposal approval, a research proposal was submitted to the district via email with a request to survey all district principals and vice/assistant principals. Both districts provided consent to conduct research and offered to send the initial participation request to each school principal and vice/assistant directly. This helped school administrators to understand they had permission from the district to participate in the survey, if they

wished. Potential research participants were sent up to three emails requesting their participation.

For those participants who chose to provide their name and email address to be entered to win a $50 Visa gift card for their school's special education program, they were able to do so on the final question of the survey. A total of 76 individuals provided their name and email address. The names and email addresses of those provided for the gift card drawing were removed from the survey data and entered onto a new spreadsheet so that they could not be used in conjunction with data analysis. Using the information included in each person's school district email address, individuals were divided up by the region of the state in which they work. For each region of the state, the list of names (ranging from three names in Region 2 to 34 names in Region 3) was entered into a random name selector (https://www.abcya.com/games/random_name_picker) and a total of six names were chosen to receive the gift cards. Winners were notified via email and asked to provide their school's mailing address so the gift card could be mailed to them.

Procedure

Approval was obtained from the Boise State University IRB prior to beginning this study. After obtaining IRB approval, the survey was opened and an initial recruitment email was sent to all potential participants the morning of Monday, January 11, 2021. In order to increase the response rate, a second email requesting participation was sent to the same group of individuals on the afternoon of Wednesday, January 20, 2021. After the second email, four participants reached out via email to state that they had completed the survey. The names of those individuals were removed from the final email requesting participation, which was sent on the afternoon of Friday, January 29,

2021. The survey was closed to all responses on Sunday, January 31, 2021 after three weeks of being open for responses. A total of 189 surveys were started by participants, with 101 fully completed. Further discussion regarding the number of participants who partially completed the survey will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Subjectivity Statement

The use of multiple sources of data and methods (survey questions, scenario-based questions, statistical analysis and coding) allow me to gain a better understanding of how current principals' participation in principal preparation programs provided the knowledge and skills necessary to increase understanding of their responsibility within the special education process. However, it is necessary to make clear my subjectivity in this study. As a former special education teacher and current parent of a child with a disability, I am well-versed in my understanding of the special education process. As part of my current role as a Special Education Statewide Instructional Coordinator, I provide training and technical assistance to public school teams in the state of Idaho on the implementation of the IDEA. Through my training and support to district and school teams, I have a unique opportunity to observe the level of special education knowledge and understanding of general educators, special educators, and school administrators. I understand what works and what does not, how parents might feel when their school principal is engaged or unengaged in a meeting, and what an administrator's support looks like through the eyes of a special educator. These perspectives can also be disadvantages. What worked for me as a special educator may not work for others. The experiences I've had as a parent may not be anything like the experiences of others. My expectations may be higher than others', given that I have a child who requires special

education services *and* I understand what implementation of special education services and instruction should include. My expectations for interaction with a school administrator in a meeting or on an IEP team may be very different than the expectations of other parents or special education team members. In order to ensure my analysis of data is completed without bias, I recruited three individuals knowledgeable about the special education process and the purpose of special education to support me in scoring scenario responses using a rubric. These individuals were asked to help me determine whether or not my analysis is based on the data, or if I interjected my personal views into the information beyond the scope of the study. Based on their feedback, I made necessary adjustments and include this step in my reporting of the data.

Knowing that my desire to study school principals and their understanding of the special education process is driven by my experience as both a special educator and a parent of a child with a disability, my views on special education practices and my experiences over time have shaped those views. This disclosure may help to better understand my views and trust that my motives, process, and analysis are driven by the desire to assist principal preparation programs in better supporting principals as special education leaders in their buildings.

Data Analysis

Survey results for demographic questions and Likert-scale questions were analyzed using statistical analysis that was completed as part of the Qualtrics data analysis function. In order to understand the overall demographics of study participants, quantitative data were analyzed first. This allowed me to identify who participated in the study, the participants' backgrounds and experience with SWD, the school level they

work in (elementary, middle/junior high, high school, K-12 or combination), and the educational region of the state their school/district is located in.

Next, qualitative data were reviewed and coded to determine themes and patterns among the responses. For the open-ended survey question requesting participants to identify topic(s) for school administrator professional development (PD), coding methods were used as part of the review of responses. For the first coding cycle, all responses were reviewed using descriptive coding. Suggested PD topics were underlined, and patterns and categories began to emerge. The use of descriptive coding allowed me to begin to organize the responses in my head and helped me to identify an "organizational grasp" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 105) of the topics. During the second cycle of coding, responses were reviewed using pattern coding to begin to connect similar topics and develop overall themes of the responses (Saldaña, 2016). The single responses were grouped into categories and then filed under similar PD topics to move from 171 separate responses to 45 sub-topics to nine overarching PD themes (see Appendix F).

The analysis of scenario-based responses was completed as a multi-step activity as well. A rubric was developed to score each scenario response provided (see Appendix G). The rubric was divided into four levels: Unsatisfactory (1), Basic (2), Proficient (3), and Exemplary (4). Descriptions of each level were included within the rubric and covered components of expectations for learning, descriptions of specially designed instruction, review of practices, team-based decision making, and student confidentiality. Items within the (4) Exemplary category of the rubric were developed first using resources including the IDEA and expertise from Idaho special education professionals. The scenarios included in the survey were provided to two special education

professionals and they were asked to answer them using their own knowledge of special education and the IDEA. The third professional, a former Director of Special Services, current school psychologist, and parent of an individual with a disability, also answered the scenarios using her own experience as a special education administrator and parent who has attended numerous special education meetings with various school administrators. The responses from all three individuals assisted me in developing the elements of each category.

In order to ensure scoring of scenarios using the rubric was objective and fair, these same three experts in special education were also invited to score scenarios to ensure I was not injecting bias into my analysis. One of the experts, as described above, is a current school psychologist and Director of Idaho Special Education Support and Technical Assistance (SESTA), in addition to being former Director of Special Services and parent of an individual with a disability. The second expert is a former special education teacher, current Statewide Special Education Instructional Coordinator, and parent of a student with a disability, and the third expert is a former special education teacher, former general education teacher, and current Statewide Special Education Instructional Coordinator.

After IRB approval to add additional personnel to the project was granted, the three experts were provided a 30-minute training via Zoom on the contents of the rubric and scoring procedures. Each individual was given 33 of the 99 total responses to Scenario One to review and score, and 31 or 32 of the 97 total responses to Scenario Two to review and score. As the researcher, I used the rubric to score all responses from each scenario. I then reviewed the scores I provided for each scenario and the second rater's

scores for each scenario. For any scores that did not match between the two scorers, a third individual (a second one of the three experts) was asked to score the response a third time. The same score that was indicated by two reviewers was used in each situation.

After scenarios were scored, a second, more nuanced review of the scenario responses was conducted. Each scenario response was read and, using structural coding, statements relating to the scenario directions and rubric attributes were underlined (Saldaña, 2016). This allowed me to begin to see similarities in guidance, ideas, and terminology that were used within the responses. The responses were then reread again for a third time to identify any additional statements that aligned with the rubric and scenario directions. This later allowed me to review, at a glance, all of the statements that were covering the same topic and use the information as part of my data analysis. This process was completed for the responses for both scenarios (items 12 and 13).

For the scenario describing the parent calling for the removal of a disruptive student (item 12), seven overall themes were pulled from the responses. The identified themes were *teaming and collaboration; implementation and instruction; review plan; data review and collection; observation; adjustments to plan; confidentiality.* Table 1 provides sample responses that align with each identified theme.

Table 3.1   **Survey Item 12 (Ella) Themes and Sample Responses**

Theme	Sample Responses
Teaming & Collaboration	"meet with the SPED case manager and teacher" "visit with the SpEd and Gen Ed teacher and para" "set up a meeting with Ella's parents and the school team" "go to the case manager" "then the IEP team needs to meet"
Implementation & Instruction	"determine if it is being followed with fidelity" "see if the behavioral plan is being followed" "analyze how/if the plan is being implemented" "make sure the plan was being implemented properly" "proper implementation of the current behavior plan"
Review Plan	"review the IEP" "examine Ella's IEP to review service minutes" "review Ella's IEP and Behavior plan" "make sure that there was a behavior plan in place" "request another copy of Ella's IEP, behavior plan"
Data Review & Collection	"look at frequency, patterns, and function of the behavior" "look at the data" "see what behavior data she has" "see whatever data the teacher had pertaining to the plan, # of incidents" "look at SPED data"
Observation	"attempt to observe all the students at lunch, recess and other activities" "spend time in the classroom observing Ella" "conduct observations" "observe the class a few times" "make multiple observations of the classroom and note Ella's behavior"

Adjustments to Plan	"we could look at additional supports, different placement"
	"make revisions to behavior plan, or add support in implementing behavior plan"
	"see what changes we need to make to her behavior plan"
	"At this point, Ella either responds and we continue to tweak the BIP."
	"determine if the services needed to be increased due to need"
Confidentiality	"due to FERPA laws I couldn't disclose any information about the other child involved in the concern"
	"I would indicate I cannot talk specifically about Ella with this parent"
	"keep the privacy of Ella's IEP to self"
	"Would not provide them with any other details."
	"explain that there is a plan of support in place for Ella"

For the scenario in which a student with a Specific Learning Disability is not making adequate progress (item 13), five overall themes were pulled from the responses. The identified themes were *specially designed instruction; instruction and instructional strategies; accommodations and modifications; assess current skills; services and supports.* Table 2 provides sample responses that align with each identified theme.

Table 3.2   Survey Item 13 (Bo) Themes and Sample Responses

Theme	Sample Responses
Specially Designed Instruction	"specific learning disability in reading which means that he needs additional and alternate kinds of supports to be successful"
	"The Special Education experience is to help him to grow to the greatest extent that he can"
	"specially designed instruction in the least restrictive environment"
	"to provide equal access to learning"
	"Special Education is how we try to meet your child's needs"
Instruction & Instructional Strategies	"tailor the instruction around those needs"
	"look at the interventions"
	"he may even need some specialized curriculum to support his goals"
	"inquire about the interventions in place"
Accommodations & Modifications	"SPED services allow his teachers to accommodate and modify his classroom work to make it more accessible"
	"I would look into other accommodations and possible modifications'
	"that could mean changing accommodations"
Assess Current Skills	"re-evaluate what his specific needs are"
	"do more diagnostic testing on his reading holes"
	"do more formal testing or go the informal route and see what specific area of reading getting in his way"
	"further testing needs to be done to determine what interventions need to take place so that Bo can be successful"
Services & Supports	"this may include a change in class placement, additional support in this class"
	"I would discuss having Bo be in a different reading class."
	"try to increase service time"
	"discuss service minutes and time of day he is receiving SPED instruction"

As a final step in the data analysis process, quantitative and qualitative data were reviewed and compared to identify similarities and differences among data points and themes/concepts.

Validity and Quality

Throughout this study, measures were taken to ensure the validity and quality of the survey development, participant selection, data collection procedures and data analysis. This section will describe both the quantitative validity and the qualitative quality measures used in this study.

The focus of this research study was to better understand how current school administrators learned special education-related knowledge and skills, how often they use those skills, their confidence level in using the skills, and their application of those skills in a scenario situation. This topic of study is "relevant, timely, [and] significant" (Tracy, 2010, p. 840), as school administrators are required members of a student with a disability's evaluation and IEP team and influence the culture, climate, instructional guidance and inclusive efforts of their school (Christensen et al., 2013; Hofreiter, 2017). What is concerning, though, is that it is possible that much of the information school administrators are learning about the special education process and their role in supporting their special education teams is not learned as part of their principal preparation programs. These individuals lead teams and school communities and need to fully understand both the procedural and conceptual aspects of the IDEA. The results of this study can help educational leadership programs identify special education-focused topics to teach in principal preparation programs and current special education technical

assistance centers and state education agencies to identify appropriate PD to fill in the gaps for those who are already in the role of school administrator.

As a component of participant selection, threats to external validity were minimized by ensuring the participant sample invited to participate in the study included current school administrators from all six educational regions of the state. In order to strengthen the representative sample, it was important to include school administrators who support one or more levels of P-12 students in both rural and urban districts (Bryman, 2008). By including administrators from P-12 districts (not charter administrators), external validity was also minimized because of the requirement to complete an accredited educational leadership program and have a minimum years of teaching experience prior to becoming a school administrator. The complexity of the participant group, which includes various years of experience, multiple types of experiences with SWD prior to becoming an administrator, and inclusion of both principals and vice principals, ensured the group be a strong representation of administrators across the state of Idaho (Tracy, 2010).

Although internal validity is typically low in cross-sectional designs (Bryman, 2008) to begin with, I attempted to increase the internal validity of this study by not providing participants access to the rubric (used to score scenarios) prior to answering scenario questions. While there was no experimental vs. control grouping in this study, access to the critical elements of each level of scoring may have given participants the specific information I was looking for, rather than the response they would most likely provide if the school administrator were in the situation outside of a research setting.

Lastly, replicability and transferability were considered throughout the research and writing processes. I have clearly outlined how study participants were selected, including the criteria used to include (and exclude) Idaho school principals. The use of a pilot study helped to ensure the survey process was easy for participants to follow, the instructions were clear, and the questions were understandable and valid (they measured what they were supposed to) (Bryman, 2008; Dillman, 2014; Fowler, 2014). The results and feedback gathered from the pilot study participants provided me with information to further strengthen my survey so that it truly measured what it was intended and provided me with the data needed to complete my study. The thick description of the survey development and implementation processes allow for replicability in future studies, and can help other educational researchers to trust the transferability of my findings to theirs (Tracy, 2010).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results and interpretations of this mixed-methods study. The chapter begins with a review of the three research questions guiding the study, the methodology used to analyze the data, and a summary of the survey results.

Review of Methodology

This research study aimed to gather information to better understand how Idaho's school administrators are most likely to learn the knowledge and skills associated with their role in special education-related activities. The study focused on gathering data in order to answer three research questions:

- How are school principals most likely to learn the knowledge and skills associated with their role in special education-related activities?

- What do current principals identify as the most important things to know about special education in order to be an effective school leader?

- How do demographic factors and reported self-efficacy relate to how current principals perform on special education-based scenarios?

Data for this research study were collected using a researcher-developed survey that was distributed via email to 837 current principals and vice/assistant principals in the state of Idaho. The survey consisted of 13 items that gathered information to address and answer the three research questions. Data will be reviewed and presented in the order it was within the survey.

Summary of Results

<u>Survey Response Rates</u>

This survey was emailed to 837 principals and vice/assistant principals in the state of Idaho. When the initial survey request was sent, 25 emails bounced, and 14 emails were reported as failed. This could be caused by inaccurate recording of email addresses from websites, changes to school administrators within districts since posting email addresses, invalid email addresses, not all administrator email names and email addresses posted on district websites, and/or district firewalls. Of the 798 emails that presumably reached their destinations, 189 participants submitted responses to the survey and 101 of those individuals completed all 13 survey items. While it is unknown why almost half of the participants did not complete the full survey, several assumptions can be made. In reviewing responses for completion, 69 participants completed all survey questions except the final two scenario responses. The scenario responses in survey items 12 and 13 required the participant to not only answer the question but do so after considering their own response to the situation, which may have been more difficult than individuals wanted to put effort toward. Another assumption is that participants who did not complete all survey items may have opened the email during a quick stop at their desk but did not have time to dedicate to responding to open-ended questions. Finally, research on survey response rates with regard to school principals indicates that they may be less likely to complete a web-based survey than a paper survey, as much of their day is spent away from their desks and web-based surveys can be "easily overlooked or discarded" in the midst of their day (Jacob & Jacob, 2012, p. 415). Table 4.1 identifies survey items completed by participants.

Table 4.1   Portions of Incomplete Surveys

Participants, *n*	Survey Items Completed
101	1-13
69	1-11
2	1-8, 10
17	1-6

Note. Number of participants out of 798 who received the survey participation request.

Calculation of the response rate was completed by using the number of full and partial responses (*n*=189) divided by the total number of emails that were not bounced back or failed (*n*=798). This equates to a 24% response rate, which is just beyond one standard deviation below the average mean response rate in educational studies (*M*=49; *SD*= 24.1), according to Baruch & Holton (2008). The survey was open for responses for a three-week period. Efforts to increase the response rate included two reminder emails to all potential participants as well as an incentive drawing. The initial email requesting participation in the survey was sent on a Monday morning at approximately 10:00am, the first reminder email was sent on a Wednesday at approximately 3:40pm, and the final reminder email was sent to potential participants on a Friday at approximately 1:30pm.

To confirm that although there was a low response rate the results are still representative of the population of Idaho's school administrators, information on the number of responses from each educational region in the state was reviewed. Idaho school districts are divided into six educational regions across the state, which include both suburban and rural LEAs. Individuals who participated in the survey report working across all six educational regions of the state. Just over half of participants report that their school/district is located in Region 3, which is located in and around Boise (the state

capital) and the most populated region of the state. Of the 837 school administrators asked to participate in this study, 42% are located in Region 3 alone. School administrators who work in Region 4, which includes 13% of Idaho's schools, were the second largest group of participants with a 17% participation rate. While participant representation was higher than the percent of schools in Regions 3 and 4, participants from the other four regions of the state represented less than the precent of schools in their regions. Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of the number of study participants in each educational region. This representative sample will also allow me to generalize the level of special education-related knowledge and skills across the state.

Table 4.2   **Participant Representation of Idaho's Educational Regions**

Region	Participants, *n*	Participants, %
1	12	6.35
2	8	4.23
3	98	51.85
4	33	17.46
5	15	7.94
6	23	12.17

Demographic Information

Of the 189 individuals who responded to the survey, 73.02% (*n*=138) are current principals and 26.98% (*n*=51) are current vice or assistant principals in the state of Idaho. The gender identification of principals was 44.2% (*n*=61) male and 55.8% (*n*=77) female, while 40% (*n*=20) of vice principals identify as male and 60% (*n*=30) identify as female. One individual indicated N/A as a response to the question asking their gender identity.

Overall, the majority of participants work at the elementary level (49.21%). As a rural state, Idaho's educators often wear multiple hats as they fulfill their professional duties. This is apparent through responses to the question regarding the level of education school administrators currently work in. Of the 189 responses, 6.35% of participants indicated they work in a combination of levels or multiple roles as school leaders. While all 12 participants support some level of elementary, middle, and/or high school students, four of the individuals also serve as their district's Superintendent and one individual fulfills the role as their district's Director of Special Education. Figure 4.1 provides data on specific numbers of participants for each level of education: elementary, middle school/junior high, high school, K-12, or combination.
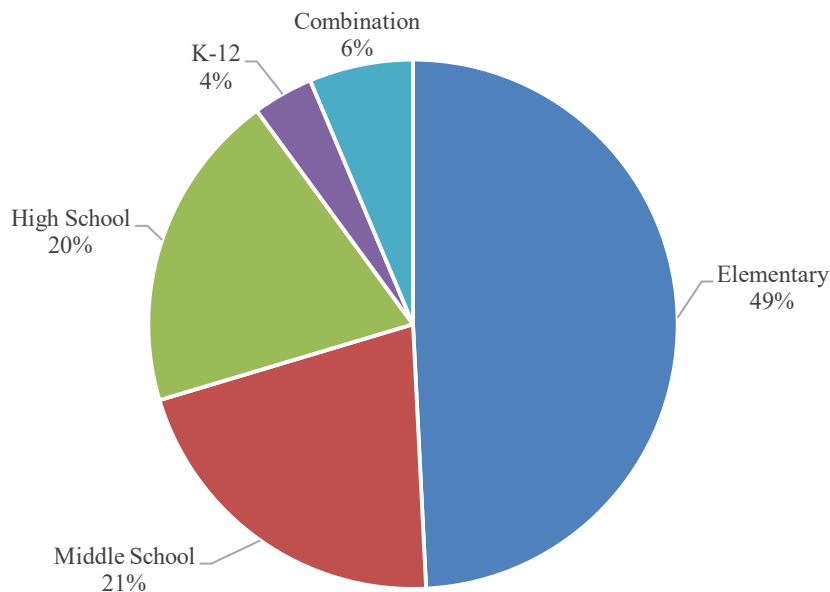
Figure 4.1   School Level Supported by Administrator

Participants were also asked to identify the length of time they have been a school administrator, given a range from 0 to 21+ years. The largest group of participants reported that they have been a school administrator for two to five years (28.04%). The

smallest group were those participants who have been working as school administrators for 21+ years, which was 5.82% (see Figure 4.2).
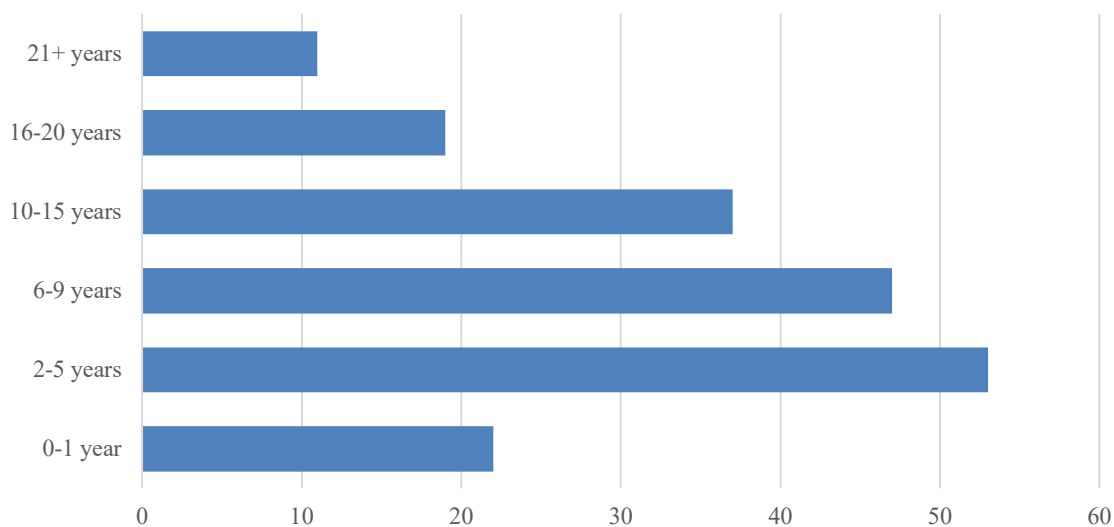
Figure 4.2   Years of Experience as an Administrator

The final demographic question focused on participants' previous experience with students with disabilities. Participants were asked to choose all answers that apply to their specific level of experience, which means that the final number of responses is more than the 189 surveys that were started. As expected, there were a high percentage (64.34%; *n*=157) of participants who had SWD in their general education classroom for one or more years. During the 2019-2020 school year, 65% of Idaho's SWD spent 80% or more of their school day in the general education classroom (ISDE, 2019), meaning there is a high likelihood that general educators will provide instruction to SWD in their classrooms before becoming school administrators. The percentage of participants who indicated they were previously special educators prior to their role as an administrator was 13.52% (*n*=33). Outside of the school setting, 13.93% (*n*=34) of participants know

someone with a disability, while 8.2% (*n*=20) are a parent of a child with a disability. There were no participants who indicated they had no experience with SWD prior to becoming a school administrator. Within Appendix H, the breakdown of the 44 participants who reported two or more experiences with SWD prior to becoming a school administrator is reported.

Special Education-Related Activities

After reviewing the literature (Bateman et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2015; Guzman, 1997; McLaughlin, 2009; Schultz, 2011; Staehr Fenner et al., 2015; Weatherly, 2019) to identify a list of special education-related activities school administrators should participate in as part of their role, three questions were developed with those activities included. The next section will outline those questions and participant responses.

Participation in Special Education-Related Activities

Using a Likert-type scale, participants were first asked to identify the extent to which they participate in special education-related activities within their role (see Figure 4.3). The majority of school administrators (69.19%) identified that they actively participate in IEP meetings one or more times per week. With regard to discipline of SWD, 51.74% participants do so one or more times per month, while 33.14% of participants discipline SWD one or more times per week. The third activity listed was formal observation of special education teachers. A large majority of school administrators (68.60%) complete this activity one or more times per month, while 8.1% do not formally observe special education teachers at all. The percentage of participants who do not formally observe special education teachers may be due to having another

administrator in the building who completes special education supervision/observation or another individual within the district (such as the Director of Special Education).

The fourth activity listed is to provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD. Approximately 52% of participants indicated they do so one or more times per month, which could align with their monthly, formal observations of special education teachers or even their general education teacher observations. The final activity listed is participation in school-based special education staff meetings, which the majority of participants (51.16%) indicated they participate in one or more times per week. Just over one-third of participants indicated they participate in school-based special education staff meetings one or more times per month. As a whole, school administrators are most likely to report participation in these special education-related activities one or more times per month and/or one or more times per week.
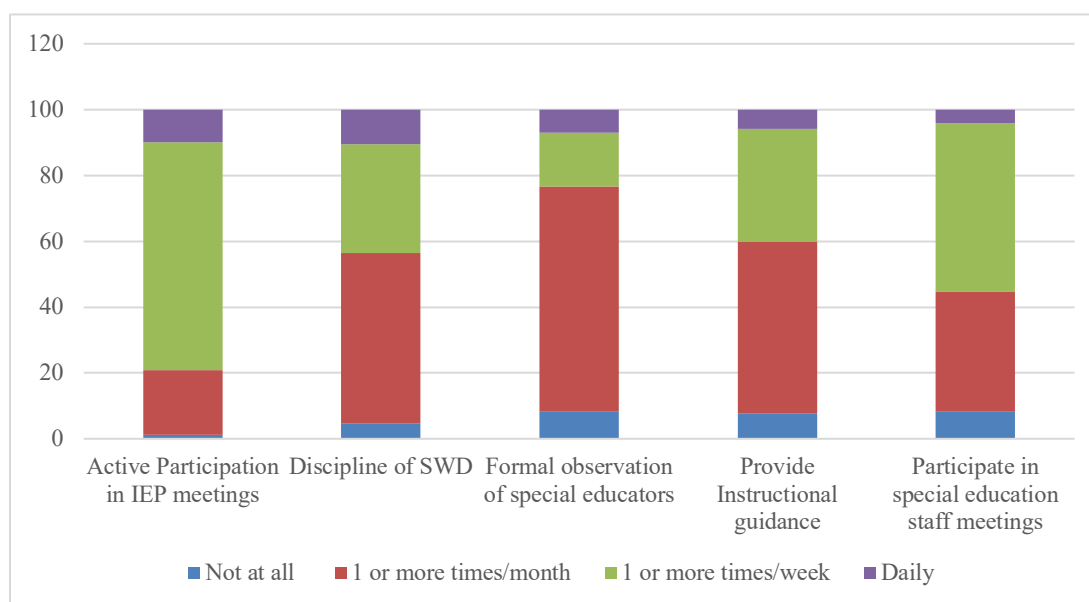
Figure 4.3   Participation in Special Education-Related Activities

<u>Learning Special Education-Related Knowledge and Skills</u>

The second Likert-style question asked participants to identify how they learned the knowledge and skills associated with the same five special education-related activities (active participation in IEP meetings; discipline of students with disabilities; formal observation of special education teachers; provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD; participation in school-based special education staff meetings) included in the previous survey question. The options for response included *principal preparation program, professional development activities, personal experience outside of school, on the job*, and *I have never learned how to do this*. Participants were asked to select all options that apply.

As a whole, participants report that they learned knowledge and skills associated with special education-related activities on the job more often than any other format see Figure 4.4). Over 50% of participants report they learned the skill of active participation in IEP meetings on the job. The knowledge and skills associated with discipline of students with disabilities, which participants reported they participate in most often on a weekly or monthly basis, is most often learned on the job as well. This is a similar situation to formal observation of special education teachers and providing guidance on instructional strategies for SWD. The last topic participants were asked to indicate where they learned the knowledge and skills was participation in school-based special education meetings. Only 17% of participants reported that they learned this information during their principal preparation programs, while over half learned this information on the job as well.
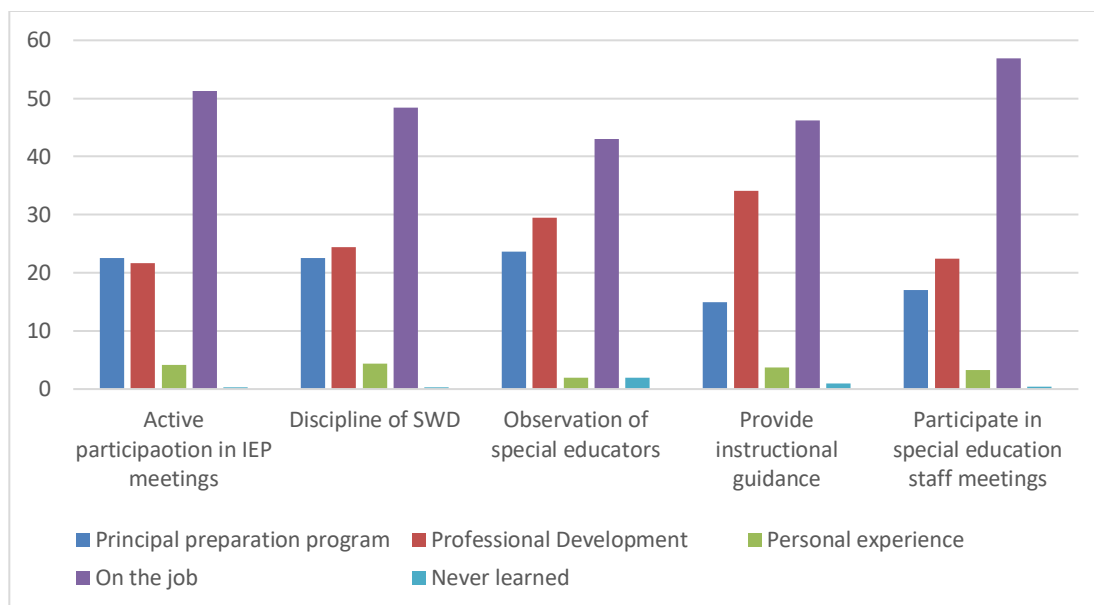
Figure 4.4   Learning Special Education Knowledge and Skills

Reviewing the responses provided by those who identified themselves as former special educators, participants reported learning how to actively participate in IEP meetings, discipline of SWD, how to provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD and participation in school-based special education staff meetings on the job more often than any other format. Because there was not a question asking participants to delineate between "on the job" in their current position or former position, these participants may have learned these skills on the job as special educators, rather than as school administrators.

Level of Confidence Related to Special Education Activities

The final Likert-style question addressed the same five special education-related activities as previous questions. This question asked participants to identify their level of self-efficacy related to each of the five activities. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they currently feel able to complete the activities, with the options presented as *not at all, to a very little extent, to some extent,* and *to a great extent.*

As a whole, participants reported feeling able to participate in all activities to a great extent. The one area that was not rated as high was participants' confidence in providing guidance on instructional strategies for SWD. Administrators' confidence level related to this activity were more evenly split between to a great extent (46.51%) and to some extent (41.86%) than the other activities listed within this survey question. A single participant indicated they did not feel confident in providing guidance on instructional strategies for SWD or formal observation of special education teachers (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3   Level of Confidence Related to Special Education Activities (all participants)

	To a great extent		To some extent		To a very little extent		Not at all	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Active participation in IEP meetings	148	86.05	23	13.37	1	0.58	0	0
Discipline of SWD	117	68.02	50	29.07	5	2.91	0	0
Formal observation of special education teachers	112	65.12	49	28.49	10	5.81	1	0.58
Guidance on instructional strategies	80	46.51	72	41.86	19	11.05	1	0.58
Participation in school-based staff meetings	114	66.28	49	28.49	7	4.07	2	1.16

Data were also analyzed to review responses from those who reported they were special educators prior to their current role as a school administrator (see Table 4.4). For all five activities, participants overwhelmingly reported they felt they were able to complete the activities to a great extent. There were two activities (provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD and participate in school-based special education meetings) where one individual indicated they feel able to complete to a very little extent. None of the participants reported they do not feel confident at all.

Table 4.4   Level of Confidence Related to Special Education Activities (Former Special Educators)

	To a great extent		To some extent		To a very little extent		Not at all	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Active participation in IEP meetings	27	96.42	1	3.57	0	0	0	0
Discipline of SWD	25	89.3	3	10.7	0	0	0	0
Formal observation of special education teachers	23	82.14	5	17.85	0	0	0	0
Guidance on instructional strategies	20	71.42	7	25.0	1	3.57	0	0
Participation in school-based staff meetings	26	92.86	1	3.57	1	3.57	0	0

School Administrator Professional Development

In order to understand the PD topics school administrators feel would be beneficial, survey item 9 asked participants to identify special education-related topics for professional development. In response to this question, 171 separate responses were provided by participants. The responses ranged from single, concrete ideas such as "requirements of an IEP" and "how to take notes in an IEP meeting" to more general concepts like "the impact of special education law on daily activities in special education". The single responses were reviewed and categorized into 45 sub-topics, which included all components of the special education process. Example sub-topics include supervision/evaluation, IEP team members, discipline, instruction in core subjects, and implementation of the IEP. The 45 sub-topics were nested under nine overarching PD themes:

- special education law

- the special education process

- special education eligibility

- IEP development

- supporting special education teachers

- instruction

- general education

- other (sensory, English learners, universal design for learning)

The complete list of 45 sub-topics and nine themes can be found in Appendix F.

Most Important Things to Know about Special Education

Using a list of nine special education topics and skills that aligned to the special education-related knowledge and skills pulled from the literature, survey item 11 asked participants to identify what they believe are the three most important things to know about special education. The list included the following items: components of special education law including timelines and requirements, supervision/evaluation of special education teachers, identifying services and the Least Restrictive Environment, discipline of students with disabilities, how to read and understand an IEP, how to facilitate an IEP meeting, ensuring all students with disabilities have meaningful access to general education content, how to support special education teachers in their roles, and helping students with disabilities to meet grade-level expectations alongside peers. Participants were asked to drag/drop the three most important items, in order from one to three.

The aggregated data in Figure 4.4 show that the top three areas chosen most often by participants are components of special education law, including timelines and requirements (n=117), all students with disabilities have meaningful access to general education content (n= 107), and how to support special education teachers in their roles (n=85).
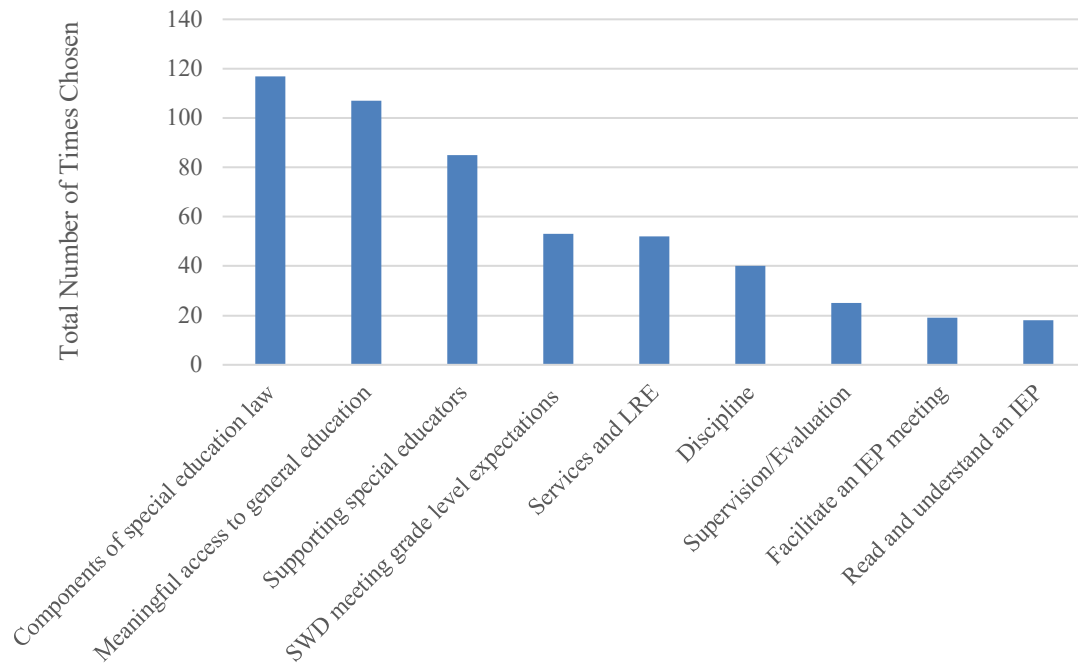
**Figure 4.5   Most Important Things to Know About Special Education
(aggregated data)**

When data were disaggregated to identify the number of times items were chosen

as the first, second and third most important things to know about special education (see

Figure 4.5), participants chose components of special education law including timelines

and requirements as the most important thing to know about special education (n=56).

The second most important thing to know, as identified by the majority of participants, is

how to support special education teachers in their roles (n=33), and the third most

important thing to know about special education is that all students with disabilities have

meaningful access to general education content (n=31).
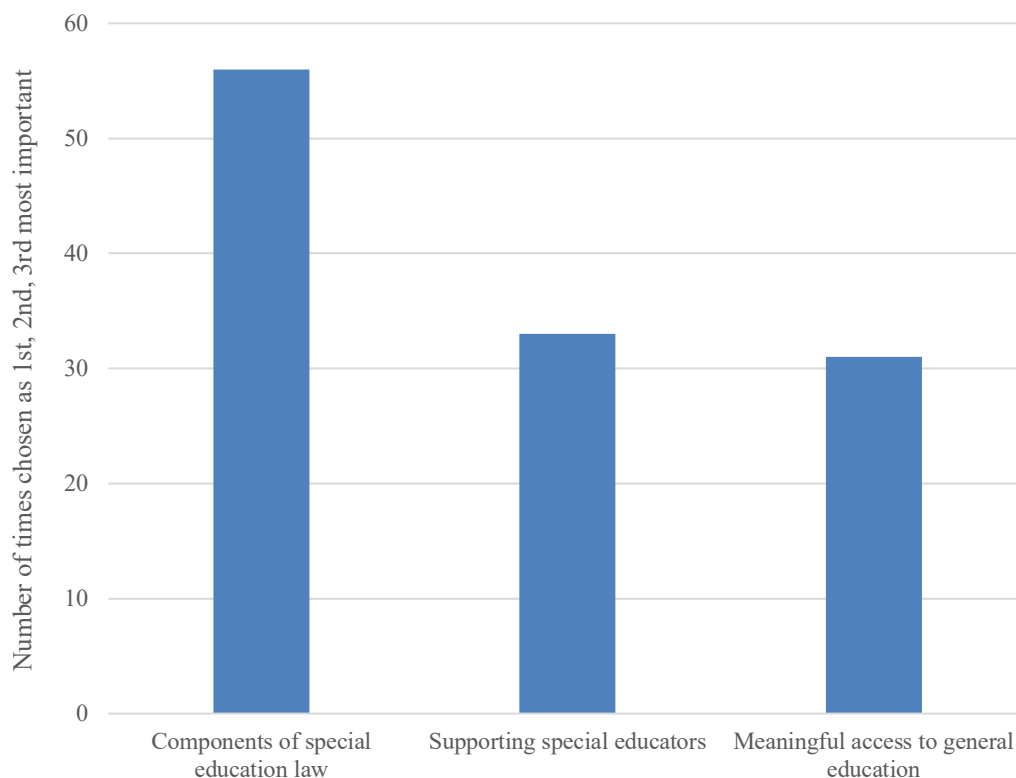
Figure 4.6   Most Important Things to Know About Special Education (disaggregated data)

Looking at the disaggregated data from the perspective of administrators who were former special educators, the same three items (components of special education law including timelines and requirements, how to support special education teachers in their roles, all students with disabilities have meaningful access to general education content) were chosen as the top three most important things for school principals to know about special education. The difference with these results, though, is that former special educators identified all students with disabilities have meaningful access to general education content as the most important item (n=11), how to support special education teachers in their roles as the second most important item (n=6) and components of special

education law including timelines and requirements as the third most important item (n=4).

<u>Special Education Scenarios</u>

Each of the final two survey questions provided participants with a special education-related scenario to read and respond to, given specific instructions within the scenario. Using a researcher-developed rubric (see Appendix G), responses were reviewed and provided a score of (1) Unsatisfactory, (2) Basic, (3) Proficient, or (4) Exemplary based on criteria established within the rubric.

Scenario number one read *A parent of a 2nd grade student calls you to voice their concerns about a student in their child's class who is disruptive and not allowing their child to learn (or the teacher to teach). They tell you the student's name is Ella, which was given to them by their own child, and ask that the child be removed from the classroom. You are familiar with Ella and recognize that she currently receives special education services in your school.*

After reading the scenario, participants were asked to explain how they would respond to the parent and how they would address the parent's concern with Ella's teacher(s). There were 105 responses to this scenario, six of which were removed prior to scoring as they were not able to be scored (string of letters, scenario copied/pasted into the response or punctuation without content). Of the 99 scored responses, 12 responses received a score of (4) Exemplary, 23 responses received a score of (3) Proficient, 32 responses received a score of (2) Basic, and 32 responses received a score of (1) Unsatisfactory. Table 4.5 provides an example response from and the frequency of each score.

Table 4.5 **Scores and Example Responses for Scenario Question: Ella**

Score	Example Response	Frequency, *n*
4	"I would thank the parent for sharing her concerns. I would tell her I needed some time to resolve the issue before making any class changes. If needed, I would indicate I cannot talk specifically about Ella with this parent. I would review Ella's IEP and Behavior plan. I would gather data and observation information from the special education teacher, staff, and general education teacher. I would review the data and ask the special education teacher to call an IEP meeting with Ella's IEP team. I would come to the meeting with ideas about how to resolve the issue but would listen to the team and ask for input from all team members as we revise the IEP and Behavior plan to put better supports in place for Ella."	12
3	"I would let the parent share her concerns and acknowlege [*sic*] that I understand her concern and will address with those involved as soon as possible. I would then speak with the teacher as to the concern and gain feedback from the teacher to verify the accuracy of what the student has relayed to the parent. If this is an accurate description, I would be sure that the teacher is following the BIP in place and see if the team needs to meet to modify or consider additional supports and/or option to be support this student in the LRE."	23

Score	Example Response	Frequency, *n*
2	"I would invite the parent to meet me in person. I would hear all of their concerns and respond as best I could without sharing any information that is specific to Ella. I would conduct observations in the class to see if Ella's behavior plan is indeed being followed and if other students' learning is being impacted."	32
1	"I would explain that I understand the concern. I would explain that we work very hard to make sure that learning environments are maintained and that all students have an opportunity to grow."	32

Overall, the mean score for responses from all participants was 2.15. When disaggregated as those school administrators who were not previously special educators and those who were, the averages shift. The mean score for previous special educators

was 1.82 (*n*=17) and the mean score for those who were not previously special educators was 2.23 (*n*=82).

Scenario number two read *As the school administrator, you attend an IEP meeting for Bo, a 7th grade student who receives special education services for a specific learning disability (SLD) in reading. The IEP team discusses Bo's progress in class and toward his annual IEP goals. Bo's general education teachers state he is a kind kid and seems to be trying his best. However, his performance is in the bottom quarter in each of their classes. Bo's special education teacher reviews Bo's progress toward his goal (you may assume the goal is appropriate). Bo has not met his reading goal this year or the past two times his IEP has been reviewed. While he has improved as a reader, over the past three years the discrepancy between his performance and his peers' performance has grown, according to progress monitoring and assessment results.*

Bo's general education teachers are concerned that the work in their classes may be too difficult for him because of his disability. Bo's special education teacher is open to suggestions. She states that currently, she helps Bo with his classwork, reminds him to turn in his assignments, and works with his general education teachers to apply his accommodations to class assignments and testing. She is frustrated and doesn't know what else to do. Bo's parents are very concerned about the data that shows Bo falling farther behind his peers. They want to know what can be done and they are still a little confused on the purpose of special education. They ask, what does it mean to claim Bo needs special education? He doesn't appear to need what is being provided if he's falling farther behind.

After reading this scenario, participants were asked to explain how they would answer Bo's parents and what they would say to Bo's general and special education teachers given their comments regarding Bo, his progress, his needs, and his disability. There were 104 responses to this scenario, seven of which were removed prior to scoring as they were not able to be scored (string of letters, scenario copied/pasted into the response or punctuation without content). Of the 98 scored responses, four responses received a score of (4) Exemplary, ten responses received a score of (3) Proficient, 46 responses received a score of (2) Basic, and 38 responses received a score of (1) Unsatisfactory. Table 4.6 provides examples from each score.

Table 4.6   Scores and Example Responses for Scenario Question: Bo

Score	Example Response	Frequency, *n*
4	"I would explain how we determine a need for special education services. Part of that determination is identify what changes need to be made to the student's delivery of instruction or content as part of their plan. I would suggest to the IEP team that we reexamine his "need" to ensure his specially designed instruction is appropriate for his current needs. I think it's important to discuss this as a team with his parents as part of the conversation as they might have current information on Bo that we don't know. I would also suggest that we reexamine his Eligibility/IEP to ensure the team is following the suggestions made by his eligibility team. As for the teachers, I would plan to observe Bo's instruction 2-3 times within the next couple of weeks. I would be looking to see that he is receiving his specialized instruction as outline in his IEP and instruction is actually happening versus study skills. I might have a follow-up conversation with the teachers that I have observed to make any necessary adjustments."	4
3	"I would start by finding out HOW the special education teacher is instructing Bo in reading skills so that he makes progress towards his reading goals. It is not enough to simply help Bo with his assignments. He needs explicit instruction in reading by his special education teacher as specified in his IEP. I would then find out if the accommodations outlined by the special education teacher were being implemented by the general education teachers appropriately and with fidelity. I would meet with the general education teachers and the special education teacher and have them walk me through the curriculum and how they are accommodating assignments and testing for Bo. I would explain to Bo's parents that the purpose of special education is to provide additional support that is specific to Bo's learning needs and work with them and the teachers to come up with a plan moving forward. I would let them know the plan is fluid and can be changed as new data on Bo's progress is collected."	10
2	"The purpose of the sped program is to provide appropriate level of instruction by accommodating for the needs he has that otherwise makes the instruction out of reach for him. The strategies currently being used are not matched to the goals and or the SLD needs. As a team we need to re-evaluate what his specific needs are and ensure we are using research based strategies targeting Bos specific struggles. They should be	46

	keeping evidence as they go to review. What does the data tell us regarding our instruction? How are we meeting his accommodations? Are we?"	
1	"Team meeting, making it clear what needs he has and if we are meeting those need. If the student is not reaching the goal twice the goal probably is not appropriate and needs to be reviewed."	38

There were 33 participants who indicated they were previously special educators before their current role of school administrator. Sixteen of those individuals did not complete a response for this scenario, while 17 did. Of the 17 previous special educators who provided a response to Scenario 2 (Bo), four received a score of (1) Unsatisfactory, ten individuals received a score of (2) Basic, one individual received a score of (3) Proficient, and two individuals received a score of (4) Exemplary.

Overall, the mean score for responses from all participants was 1.8. When disaggregated as those school administrators who were not previously special educators and those who were, the averages shift. The mean score for previous special educators was 2.06 (n=17) and the mean score for those who were not previously special educators was 1.74 (n=82).

Demographic Analysis of Scenario Scores

In addition to analyzing rubric-based scores for the scenarios, demographic analysis was completed as well. There were 33 participants who indicated they were previously special educators before their current role of school administrator. Sixteen of those individuals did not complete a response for this scenario, while 17 did. Of the 17 former special educators who did respond to this scenario, seven received a score of (1) Unsatisfactory, six received a score of (2) Basic, four received a score of (3) Proficient,

and zero participants received a score of (4) Exemplary. After disaggregating scores for each scenario by gender, gender and role, school level supported, and years of experience, some patterns emerged.

When reviewing scenario scores disaggregated by identified gender, female administrators were more likely to provide proficient or exemplary responses than male administrators. Over 66% of administrators (regardless of gender) provided responses to Ella's scenario that were scored unsatisfactory or basic and 86% of participants scored unsatisfactory or basic on Bo's scenario (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7).
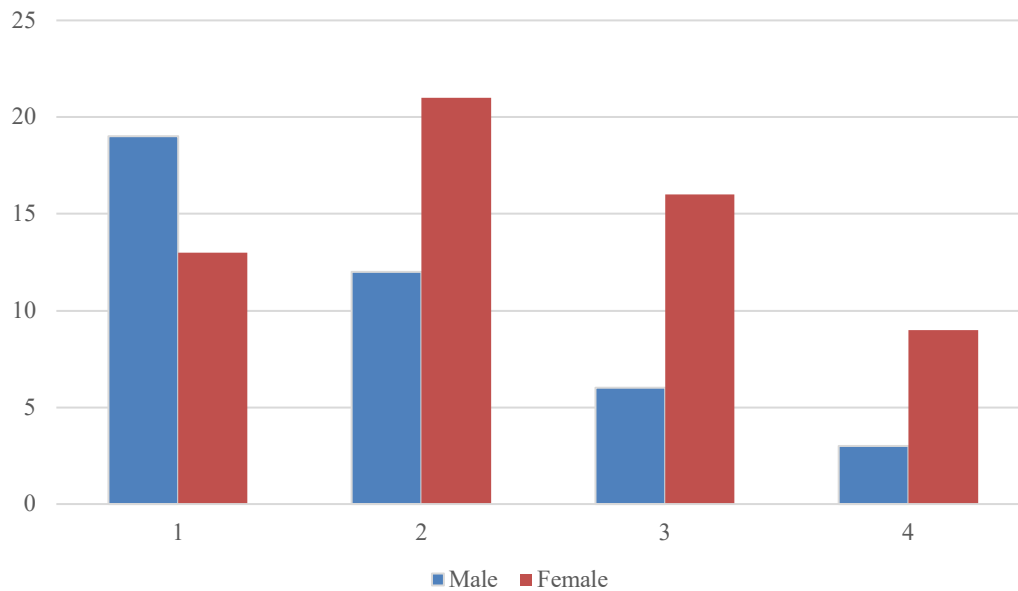
Figure 4.7   **Scenario Scores Disaggregated by Gender (Item 12, Ella)**

Table 4.8   Scenario Scores Disaggregated by Gender (Item 13, Bo)
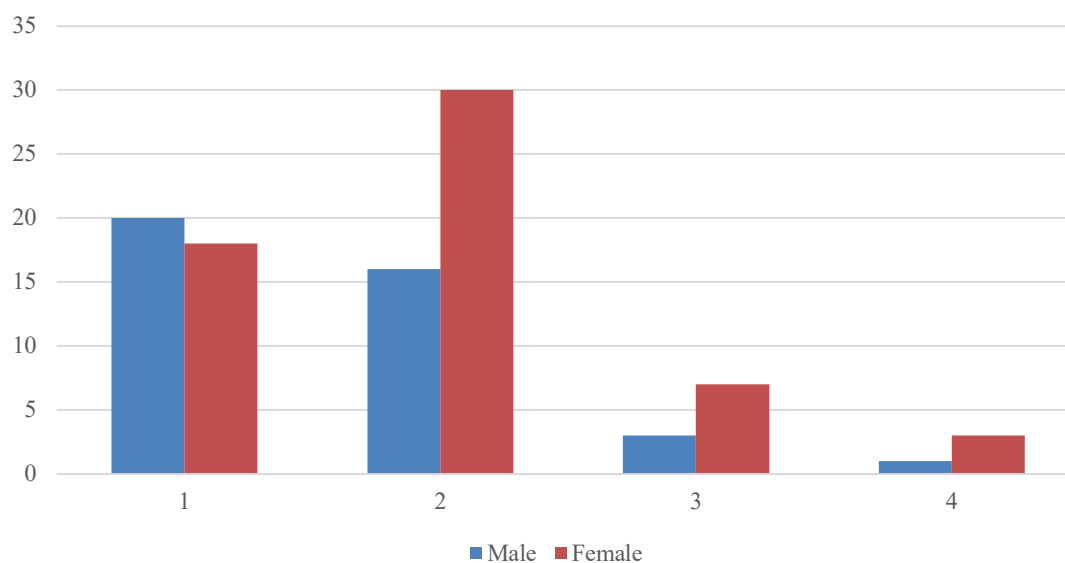
Scores were also disaggregated by role (principal or vice/assistant principal). Using this data, school principals were more likely to earn a score of proficient or exemplary than vice/assistant principals on both scenarios, while the majority of participants (regardless of role) scored unsatisfactory or basic (see Figures 4.8 and 4.9).
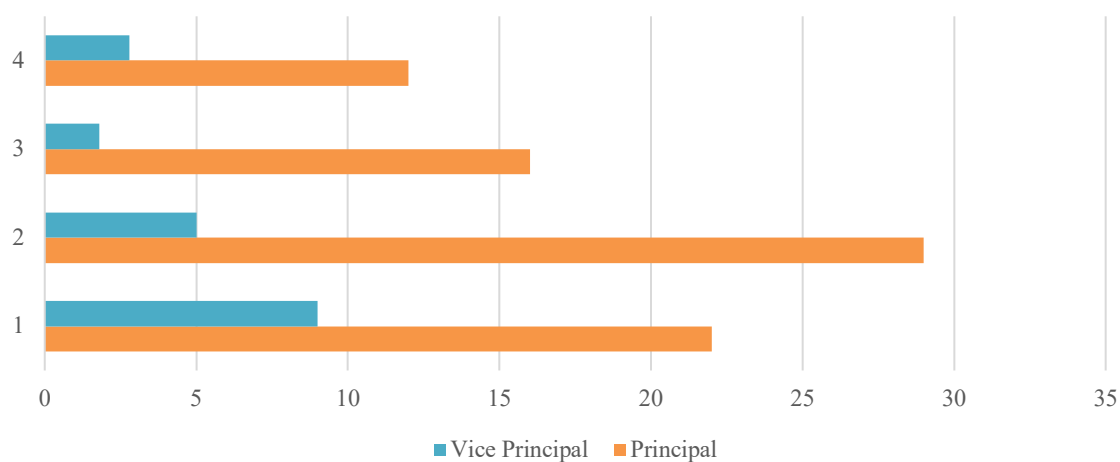
Figure 4.9   Scenario Scores Disaggregated by Role (Item 12: Ella)
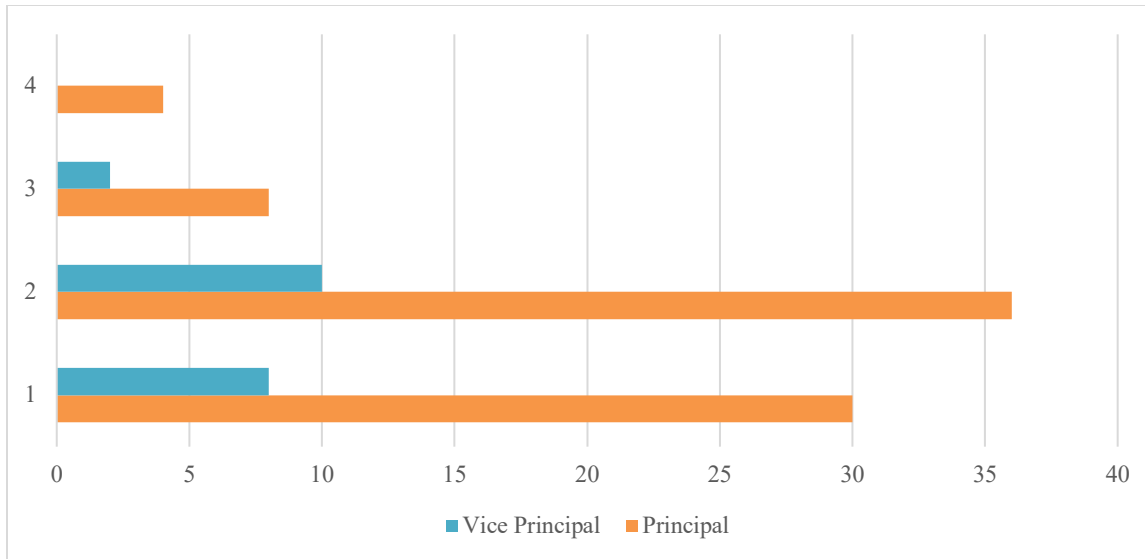
Figure 4.10   Scenario Scores Disaggregated by Role (Item 13: Bo)

When scenario scores were disaggregated by the school level supported by administrators, it was clear that the responses of elementary school administrators were more likely to score higher than the administrators supporting any other school level (see Table 4.7). Interestingly, when analyzing the data from this point of view, those administrators who support students as the middle school/junior high level, high school level, or K-12 level really struggled to provide responses that were above basic. There were only seven administrators (out of 17) at the middle school level who were able to provide a response that was scored proficient or exemplary for item 12 and only two individuals were scored proficient (with no exemplary scores) for item 13. This is concerning, as the example student for item 13 was a middle school/junior high-level student. This was the same situation for high school and K-12 administrators.

Table 4.7   **Scenario Scores Disaggregated by School Level Supported**

	Item 12 (Ella), *n*				Item 13 (Bo), *n*			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Elem	15	18	12	8	21	24	5	3
Middle School	7	3	5	2	7	8	2	0
High School	7	5	3	0	7	6	1	1
K-12	4	1	1	0	1	3	1	0
Combo	0	5	1	2	2	5	1	0
Totals	33	32	22	12	38	46	10	4

Lastly, Table 4.8 presents scenario scores analyzed by years of experience as a school administrator. When looking through this lens, the majority of administrators, regardless of years of experience, scored basic or unsatisfactory as well. When the data were analyzed by average score of each combination of years of experience, though, it was clear that those administrators who have been in the role for 16-20 years are able to demonstrate the most special education knowledge through their responses (item 12 *M* = 3.18, item 13 *M* = 2.5). The lowest *M* scores across both scenarios were given to individuals who have been in the role for 0-1 years.

Table 4.8   **Scenario Scores Disaggregated by Years of Experience**

	Item 12 (Ella), *n*				Item 13 (Bo), *n*			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
0-1	5	2	1	-	3	4	-	1
2-5	9	8	6	1	13	10	1	-
6-9	7	6	6	3	8	10	3	1
10-15	8	12	4	3	12	12	1	1
	Item 12 (Ella), *n*				Item 13 (Bo), *n*			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
16-20	-	2	5	4	-	6	4	1
21+	3	3	-	1	2	4	1	-
Totals	32	33	22	12	38	46	10	4

Qualitative Coding for Scenario Responses

In addition to coding participant responses that align with the rubric (described in Chapter 3), I used the process of holistic coding to review each scenario response individually and identify the "broad topics" within the response (Saldaña, 2016, p. 166). By focusing on the 10,000-foot view of the response, I was able to see each participant's thought process in how they would address the specific situation before I began to look at commonalities across the complete set of responses. For both sets of scenario responses, I read through each individual response one, two, or sometimes three times in order to get an idea of what the participant was trying to convey with their response. I then chose the best way to describe the overarching topic using one to three words. In some situations,

the participants' own words were used as the topic for the response as I felt they were better at capturing what the individual was trying to suggest or communicate.

After completing the coding for individual responses for item 12 (parent requests a SWD causing disruptions be moved to another classroom), I then reviewed all codes and identified four larger themes that captured the content of the responses. The first theme was *concerned parent*. The responses I felt fit well into this theme were really centered on the school administrator's response to the parent who expressed their concern, both in positive and negative ways. There were administrators who shared they would validate the parent's concerns and provide reassurance that the situation would be addressed while others took this situation as an opportunity to educate the parent on special education law or the rights of all students to access education. Seeing that this could be an opportunity for the (general education) student as well, administrators provided suggestions such as "noise-cancelling headphones to help the student if they are easily distracted in the classroom" or making a plan to help the boy to "be successful when in his class with Ella." Lastly, some administrators simply tried to "apologize for the stress", provide a vague response about addressing the issue, or thank the parent for their concern.

The second theme that captured the content of responses came from one participant's own response, a "*view from all angles.*" The suggestions or ideas that aligned to this theme centered on identifying what is working for Ella and what is not, discussing whether or not Ella's behavior plan was being effectively implemented, and taking steps to gather more information (such as conducting observations across school environments). Some participants identified multiple questions they would ask the team,

such as "Are we meeting the needs of Ella in the classroom?", "Is the conflict just bothering one student or many?", or "Is the IEP being followed, does the SPED teacher support adequately, and is there a need to seek assistance from a behavioral specialist or additional support that the district may have?".

The third theme that came out of the holistic coding for item 12 was *intervention and supports*. This theme captured the responses that addressed the questions about what is currenting being provided as well as suggestions for future supports. Some participants wondered if the LRE was appropriate for Ella, and whether or not she required additional instruction or supports outside of the general education classroom. Other participants suggested the team consider identifying new interventions or simply reviewing the current ones to ensure they were being implemented with fidelity.

Lastly, multiple responses were captured in the theme labeled *collegial support*. While many of the suggestions, ideas, and responses focused on Ella, her plan, and the classroom setting, there were multiple statements indicating administrators were willing to provide additional support to their teachers as well. These statements included providing "additional support to the classroom teachers", helping teachers or paraprofessionals in implementation of the behavior intervention plan, providing training (in-building or outside) to the team, or adding additional staff members to help support behavior intervention for Ella.

Shifting to the holistic coding and themes for item 12 (young man with a specific learning disability who is making limited progress), I noticed more polarizing responses from participants. Beginning with instruction and placement, there were comments that could fall on both ends of the support continuum. There were comments made about

decision-making, which ranged from the administrator making unilateral decisions to the team making data-based decisions together. Lastly, statements regarding accommodations and supports vs. instructional needs seemed to fall at either end of the spectrum as well. See Table 4.9 for specific examples.

Table 4.9   Polarizing Statements Regarding Scenario 2 (Bo)

"I would expect the Gen Ed Teacher to be differentiating content and evidence with the student in collaboration with Sp Ed."	"Bo may require a program that deals more with adapted curriculum such a developmental program."
"I would meet with the team to decide what do we need to do to determine why he is not improving…I would remind the team that Bo belongs to all of us and we need to work as a team to decide how to best meet his needs."	"He should be receiving direct instruction at his level (4th, 5th, whatever) for at least 45 min. a day and then have a 20-30 min. exposure to grade level content with support. If that wasn't happening then I would tell the parents that that plan would start tomorrow."
"How are they meeting their goals if they aren't teaching him how to read?"	"I would answer the parents by explaining the accommodations that are being provided and while the results are what they are we can assume things would be worse without them."

The first theme that I noticed after coding the responses was *excessive positivity*. While many of the responses got right to the point and addressed the concerns indicated by team members within the scenario, there were some that either didn't address them at all or attempted to put a positive spin on the situation. For example, one administrator suggested the team spend their efforts focusing on Bo's other areas of strengths ("Bo might have strengths in other areas such as math or computer skills."). Another

administrator suggested the team "focus on the things Bo does well and reassure parents that we are here to support him with things that he needs help with." In both of those responses, there were no additional suggestions to review data, look at instruction, implementation, or supports. A final example of excessive positivity included praising the teachers for their hard work <u>and</u> putting a positive spin on the situation: "I would let them know that they need to continue their hard work but to always look for specific things that BO might be excelling in and capitalize on those teachable moments."

Another theme that arose from the responses was *"looking at the whole child."* Suggestions included asking Bo his opinion as part of a team meeting or at home with parents, learning more about Bo's strengths, needs, and interests outside of the school setting, identifying what motivates Bo to learn and grow (to possibly use for motivation in the classroom setting), and seeking information about any recent changes with Bo, his family, and his health.

The third theme, labeled *"get creative,"* covers the ideas and suggestions that guide the team to adjust their current approach to Bo's education. Many suggestions included a look at and make instructional decisions using available data or reviewing and revising supports based on new data. Targeted instruction was another suggestion made by participants, including identifying specific instructional strategies that could be implemented in addition to the current supports (accommodations, homework help). Using "relevant, meaningful, and evidence-based" intervention curriculum that better meets Bo's needs was also indicated.

As a final theme, *learning more* captured the statements and ideas of participants who felt there wasn't enough current information to truly make a decision about how to

best support Bo. Their suggestions included reviewing his current eligibility report to ensure his specially designed instruction is meeting his cognitive and academic needs or completing a reassessment of Bo's skills to get updated cognitive and academic data to establish current needs. Other participants suggested completing diagnostic testing in the area of reading, and inviting the school psychologist to be part of the conversation and provide insight from a different perspective.

Overall, the participants' responses to both of the scenarios were positive and focused on truly helping each student have access to educational opportunities that will help them to be successful.

Relationship Between Special Education-Related Confidence and Skills

The final analysis completed for this study focused on the relationship between participants' confidence in their ability to participate in special education-related activities and their skills in responding to special education-based scenarios.

Within the survey, participants were asked to identify their confidence in participating in each of these special education-related activities: actively participate in IEP meetings, appropriately discipline SWD, conduct formal observations of special education teachers, provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD, and participate in school-based special education staff meetings. There were aspects of each of these five activities inherent in the special education scenarios participants were asked to respond to.

Each scenario included a component of the school administrator's active participation in IEP meetings. School administrators who addressed the need for IEP team-decision making, an understanding of the student and family in question, and the

purpose of special education were more likely to receive a score of proficient or exemplary for their response. Although neither of the scenarios overtly addressed discipline of SWD, the topic does connect with the understanding of behavioral concepts and the implementation of a student's behavior intervention plan that outlines the teams' response to a student's challenging or disruptive behaviors. The topic of formal observation of special education teachers was also inbuilt within the scenarios. By spending time observing their special education teacher(s), school administrators have a better idea of what is happening in the special education classroom with regard to planning, implementation of instruction, and data collection. This familiarity can also help administrators assess the understanding of special educator knowledge of instructional practices. For example, one administrator indicated they would complete walk-throughs of the classroom to gain a better understanding of Ella's behaviors while another asked the question "Have I observed the SPED teacher and is she competent in her instructional strategies?".

Aligning very closely with both scenarios is the activity of providing guidance on instructional strategies for SWD. The school administrator would need to understand the types of strategies that work best for instructing SWD and how to use data from IEP goal progress monitoring to support the team in making instructional decisions. They would also need to have an understanding of the difference between an accommodation (in place to remove barriers so SWD have access to learning and demonstrate their understanding of concepts) and an instructional strategy used to increase a student's skills in the area of need. Lastly, although this activity is not as closely connected to the content in the scenarios as others, participation in school-based special education meetings is an

activity that would support administrators' relationships with special education team members, would help them see the bigger picture of special education as a whole and in their buildings, and give the school administrator a chance to check in and problem-solve with their special education team. If school administrators demonstrate confidence in these five areas, one would believe they would be more likely to demonstrate their understanding through their response and score higher on special education-based scenarios.

Looking now at the relationship between participant demographics, their reported self-efficacy, and administrators' skills in answering special education-based scenarios, the majority of participants who responded to all three sets of questions (demographic, self-efficacy and both special education-based scenarios) felt they were able to participate in each of the five activities *to a great extent.* For the purpose of this analysis and study, a participant who reports "high levels of confidence" is someone who has marked *to a great extent* as their response for all five special education-related activities.

First, an analysis was completed to identify whether there was a relationship between confidence, a participant's identified gender, and their score on special education-based scenarios. There were 48 participants who reported high levels of confidence in their ability to participate in the five special education-related activities and completed the scenario responses (see Table 4.10). The average score for female responses was higher than responses by males, showing that although confidence may play a role in responses, it may be more likely that a female has more success in responding to special education situations in their buildings than a male administrator would.

Table 4.10   **Relationship Between High Levels of Confidence, Gender, and Response**

	Item 12 (Ella), M	Item 13 (Bo), M
Male	2.0	1.71
Female	2.3	2.03

Considering that both principals and vice/assistant principals in the state of Idaho must hold the same administrator certificate, the relationship between high levels of confidence, role, and response to special education-based scenarios was also identified. The scenario scores for both principals and vice principals provided the same average score ($M= 2.1$) for the responses to both scenarios, demonstrating that there is likely no difference between the skills of a principal vs. vice principal with regard to their level of confidence when responding to special education-based scenarios (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11   **Relationship Between High Levels of Confidence, Role, and Response**

	n	Item 12 (Ella), M	Item 13 (Bo), M
Principal	40	2.3	1.9
Vice/Asst. Principal	5	2.0	2.2

Next, the relationship between the number of years of experience as a school administrator, their level of confidence, and response to special education-based scenarios was identified. As Marek (2016) found, principals' self-efficacy increases as they gain more experience in their role as special education leaders. Administrators who are in their 16th-20th year in the role and demonstrate high levels of confidence in their ability to participate in special education-related activities scored the highest out of this

subgroup. Table 4.12 provides the data for each of the six levels of experience included within the survey.

Table 4.12   Relationship Between High Levels of Confidence, Experience, and Response

	n	Item 12 (Ella), *M*	Item 13 (Bo), *M*
0-1	5	1.4	2.0
2-5	8	2.25	1.25
6-9	8	2.63	2.0
10-15	15	2.07	1.86
16-20	8	3.0	2.63
21+	4	2.0	2.0

The final demographic question addressed through this lens is the school level in which the administrator works. There were more individuals who work at the elementary level than any other area (*n*=29) who completed both the confidence and scenario-based questions. While the scenario regarding a disruptive student was set in an elementary setting (and is more likely to happen in that way in the elementary school level), the scenario regarding a student with a Specific Learning Disability could take place across any level of education. The analysis of this subgroup of data showed that elementary school principals were most likely to show high levels of confidence and demonstrate comparative skills, while those who work in a K-12 setting were least likely to do the same (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13   Relationship Between High Levels of Confidence, School Level, and Response

	n	Item 12 (Ella), M	Item 13 (Bo), M
Elementary	29	2.44	2.0
Middle School	12	2.25	1.92
High School	2	2.5	1.5
	n	Item 12 (Ella), M	Item 13 (Bo), M
K-12	2	1.0	1.5
Combination	1	2.0	2.0

Summary

This chapter began with a review of the methodology used in this research study and an analysis of participant response rates. The data was then presented as it was in the survey. Finally, an analysis of participant responses to two special education-based scenarios was presented.

According to survey responses, the majority of participants learned special education-related skills while working on the job as school administrators or as part of professional development activities. Presumptively, the majority of Idaho's school leaders are accepting and working in leadership positions with little formal training in how to lead special education programs and to support special education teachers and SWD. There is a clear gap between what is being taught in principal preparation programs with regard to special education and the administrator's role as a special education leader within their buildings. The overall reported self-efficacy of school administrators who participated in this study is high, though the relationship between

confidence and skills is not always in alignment. Interpretations will be discussed more in

Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

School principals wear many hats throughout their school day and week. While they may begin their day responding to emails that arrived in their inbox overnight, the shift to focusing on students, staff, and families happens quickly as the school day begins. The constant pull between meetings, an unexpected crisis and the daily to-do list does not always leave much time for classroom visits, students, and teachers. Add on to these things the fact that the number of students found eligible for special education each year is rising (ISDE, 2018; ISDE, 2019) and the needs of the school's most vulnerable population often take more time than an administrator could plan for.

This study examined the special education-related knowledge and skills of current school administrators in the state of Idaho. The focus of this chapter is to interpret the study results and present the interpretation in alignment to the three research questions presented in Chapter 1. Within this chapter, I will also discuss the limitations of the study and the impact those limitations may have had on the findings, recommendations, and future research. Recommendations for changes to principal preparation programs, state-level policy regarding the certification of Idaho's school administrators, and school administrator professional development will be provided. Lastly, I will provide suggestions for future research to continue to strengthen the instruction and support for school administrators.

Problem Statement

The focus of this research study was to learn more about how Idaho's current school administrators are gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to be special education leaders within their buildings. The use of a web-based survey allowed me to gather information from current school administrators with regard to how they learned special education-related information, what they believe are the most important aspects of special education, and to identify how background, experience, and self-efficacy play a role in principals' skills related to special education. Although all individuals who gain an Idaho Administrator Certificate and go on to become school principals or vice principals in P-12 public school districts are required to demonstrate their understanding of the Idaho Standards for School Principals, the standards do not specifically require an understanding of the IDEA or support for students with disabilities. With a growing number of students eligible for special education in the state of Idaho (34,310 students ages 3-21 in the 2018-19 school year and 35,846 students ages 3-21 in the 2019-2020 school year) the role of the school administrator is continually expanding into support for students with disabilities and the special education teams within their buildings. It is essential for administrators to come into the role prepared to lead their teams to provide an education for SWD that will provide access to general education content and develop meaningful skills that will support them throughout their lives.

While principal preparation programs have shifted their emphasis from development of building managers to instructional leaders over the past two decades (DiPaola & Hoy, 2012; NPBEA, 2018), the topic of special education within coursework and internship activities has not been a main component of future principals' instruction. The purpose of

this study was to gain information regarding the special education-related knowledge and skills of Idaho's current school administrators. The three research questions guiding this study are:

- How are school principals most likely to learn the knowledge and skills associated with their role in special education-related activities?

- What do current principals identify as the most important things to know about special education in order to be an effective school leader?

- How do demographic factors and reported self-efficacy relate to how current principals perform on special education-based scenarios?

Answering these questions may help program coordinators of Idaho's IHE's adjust and/or strengthen their principal preparation programs to better prepare future school administrators for their role as special education leaders. Results from this study may also provide information for Idaho's educational policy makers who determine and update the Idaho Standards for School Principals to include greater emphasis on effective supports and guidance for SWD in the P-12 public school setting, and to identify areas of professional development for in-service principals who may be lacking the knowledge and skills to effectively support their special education programs.

Interpretation of the Findings

Decades of research and literature have shown that educational leadership programs across the country are not consistently providing instruction on the necessary concepts and skills related to special education that future principals need to know in order to effectively support their special education programs (Davis, 1980; Hofreiter, 2017; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Lynch, 2012; McHatton et al., 2010; Sirotnik & Kimball,

1994). The results of this study demonstrate that school administrators, despite participating in accredited educational leadership programs, continue to receive little special education-related preparation prior to their role as school leaders.

Research Question 1

Although all current school administrators in publicly-funded P-12 districts in the state of Idaho must hold a valid Idaho School Administrator Certificate, they likely attended various educational leadership programs that included varied content and clinical experiences related to special education, if any. Participants in this study indicated they were most likely to learn special education-related knowledge and skills associated with their role while in their position as a school administrator, rather than during their principal preparation programs. These results align with the findings of other researchers (Angelle & Bilton, 2009; Hofreiter, 2017; Jesteadt, 2012; Lasky & Karge, 2006), who have also identified that educational leadership programs are often lacking the essential skills necessary for fully preparing future principals as special education leaders. When programs intentionally embed special education content into coursework and activities and emphasize the connection between general and special education, future school principals will be better prepared to not only recognize that connection in practice, but also be better prepared to lead their teams in incorporating inclusive practices within their schools (Angelle & Bilton, 2009). In situations where special education topics are assumed but not explicitly or intentionally addressed, school administrators may go out on their own to seek information or answers or make costly mistakes due to a lack of knowledge (Hofreiter, 2017). With over 70 responses to the

scenario-based questions in this study scored as Unsatisfactory and much of the content learned outside of higher education coursework, it is

In addition to primarily learning special education content on the job, participants also reported that they are likely to learn special education-related content and skills through PD opportunities. This result is supported by research from Sun & Xin (2020), who surveyed rural school principals in the neighboring state of Utah and found that 75% of their participants learned special education-related information outside of their principal preparation programs and Jesteadt (2012), who asked principals to identify how they learned the six key principles of the IDEA and found that 35% of participants learned the information through district-based professional development (in contrast to 7% who learned the information through coursework). Within the present study, 29% of administrators identified that they learned how to conduct formal observations of their special education teachers and 34% identified that they learned how to provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD through PD experiences.

In an era in education where school administrators are held accountable for the learning of *all* students, it is imperative that educational leadership programs provide instruction and real-life opportunities focused on special education for future school administrators. There is so much to learn in order to be an effective school leader that it is not enough to assume that the information provided that applies to general education students will be sufficient in helping future administrators understand how to support SWD in their buildings.

<u>Research Question 2</u>

This research question focused on better understanding what current school administrators identify as the most important things to know about special education. To answer this question, participants were asked to identify the three most important things to know about special education, given a list of nine special education-related concepts and skills. The nine topics included both procedural (special education law, special education services and LRE, discipline of SWD, how to facilitate an IEP meeting, and how to read and understand an IEP) and conceptual concepts (all SWD have meaningful access to general education content, supporting special educators in their role, opportunity for SWD to meet grade level expectations, and supervision/evaluation of special educators). The three topics chosen by participants as a whole, when disaggregated to identify the number of times items were chosen as first, second, and third most important, were *components of special education law and timelines, all SWD have meaningful access to general education content,* and *how to support special education teachers in their roles.*

The foundational components of the IDEA (and in its previous iteration as the EAHCA) and the *Rowley*, *Mills*, *PARC,* and *Endrew F.* cases all circle back to SWD meaningful access to general education content. Special education legislation and guidance over the past 50 years has shifted focus from allowing SWD to learn in the same building as general education peers to ensuring their individualized needs are addressed through appropriate evaluation, an individualized plan, and specially designed instruction (Yell et al., 2010). For a school principal or vice principal to ensure meaningful access to educational opportunities, they must understand the needs of SWD

and the importance of accessing specially designed instruction in the general education setting with core instruction, if possible (Waldron et al., 2011). Without a strong foundational understanding of the IDEA, the purpose of special education, or how to effectively support special education students in their buildings, school principals may struggle to support their special education teachers or recognize when their teachers are providing students with meaningful access to general education (Christensen et al., 2013; Garrison-Wade et al., 2007). Special education programs are unlikely to meet the needs of SWD in an effective manner with high staff turnover or teachers who are unhappy and unsupported in their positions. This means that it is up to administrators to ensure they are knowledgeable about the role of the special educator and can provide them the support they need to keep attrition low and satisfaction high (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007).

Having special education-focused knowledge and skills will allow administrators to provide targeted feedback and instructional leadership, understand the role of the special educator, and recognize the needs of special educators with regard to paperwork, timelines, and the importance of time for collaboration and professional development (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007; Lynch, 2012; Mitchell, 2011). The fact that participants in this study, including those who are former special educators, identified the concept of supporting special education team members as a high priority, means that they understand the needs and benefits of the support they can provide.

On the other end of the list, the topic of *supervision/evaluation of special educators* was listed in the bottom three (with *facilitate an IEP meeting* and *read and understand an IEP* as the final two topics). It is interesting that although 6% participants identified they have little or no confidence in their ability to conduct formal observations

of their special education teachers and close to 12% identified that they have little to no confidence in their ability to provide guidance on instructional strategies for SWD, individuals felt that the supervision and evaluation of special educators was not as important of a topic as discipline of SWD, determining special education services in the LRE, or the components of special education law and timelines. In order to ensure their special education teachers are providing high-quality instruction using evidence-based practices, school principals need to understand the "teacher's specific discipline" (Rodl et al., 2018, p. 20) so they are familiar with what to look for and so that they may provide effective feedback and guidance that moves student learning forward (Staehr Fenner et al., 2015). In a 2017 study conducted by Banda Roberts and Guerra, principals responded similarly in that although they identified that they did not have a high level of knowledge in how to design curriculum for SWD or how to plan for special education program improvement, they did not identify those as areas principal preparation programs should include in their coursework (Banda Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

Research Question 3

The final research question focuses on identifying whether or not there is a connection between a school administrator's reported self-efficacy and their scores on special education-based scenarios. The concept of metacognition, or "the ability to know how well one is performing, when one is likely to be accurate in judgement, and when one is likely to be in error" (Kruger & Dunning, 1999, p. 1121) is a concept that has been shown to be difficult for individuals to master (Fischhoff et al., 1977; Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Lundeberg et al., 1994). Looking only at the responses from the participants who completed survey items 10-12 (self-efficacy and two scenarios), an overall high level of

confidence is exhibited by almost half of the administrators. This high level of

confidence, though, does not seem to align with the same group's demonstration of

special education-related knowledge and skills. The scores of school administrators who

indicated high levels of confidence ranged from Basic to Exemplary, with most falling

just above or just below a Basic score. Based only on the scenario provided, many

responses to Item 12 (student who was disruptive in class) immediately suggested that the

team increase support for Ella, rather than reviewing the plan and implementation,

identifying barriers to Ella's progress, and/or calling an IEP team meeting to discuss her

progress as a team. One of the requirements threaded throughout the IDEA is team

decision-making and including all required team members (parent, administrator, general

educator, special educator) when IEP decisions are made (IDEA, 2004). Responses to

Item 13 (student with a specific learning disability) demonstrated administrators'

difficulty understanding the difference between specially designed instruction and

accommodations. One of the requirements for special education eligibility is the need for

specially designed instruction, whereas accommodations are opportunities for the student

to demonstrate their knowledge or understanding of the content. If a school principal is

unfamiliar with the difference between instructional practices for SWD and supports to

help remove barriers (without direct instruction), supervision/evaluation and support with

instructional strategies for SWD will be difficulty and possibly inaccurate. As Fischhoff

et al. (1977) described, "people tend to be overconfident…they exaggerate the extent to

which what they know is correct" (p. 552). As results of this research indicates, when a

school principal doesn't know enough about special education to recognize that they

don't have the knowledge or skill(s) they require, they'll assume they've done well

(Kruger & Dunning, 1999). When principals are not taught the information they need to be involved in and lead their school's special education team, their lack of knowledge can lead them to believe the job they are doing is sufficient.

Looking through the lens of demographics, self-efficacy, and scores, it appears that there is likely no difference in the knowledge and skills of principals versus vice/assistant principals. This would make sense, as both roles are required to demonstrate knowledge and skills toward the same set of standards in order to be administrators in P-12 schools in the state of Idaho. Where there was a larger difference is in the experience level of administrators, related to confidence and scores. Administrators who reported they have been in the role for 16-20 years had a higher mean score for both scenarios than any other level of experience, which Marek (2016) found as well. This group also reported they have learned special education-related knowledge and skills through professional development activities more than any other experience group.

In reviewing the data from the subgroup of former special educators who responded to the scenario-based survey questions, their scores varied and were more often scored Basic or Unsatisfactory than others. This is concerning, and while Marek (2016) identified that self-efficacy is higher in school administrators who were previously special educators, it does not provide an explanation that helps clarify why there is such a difference between self-efficacy and ability in the case of former special educators. If those who have a background in special education struggle to fully explain how they would move through the process of investigating whether or not a student's plan was being implemented and how their instruction was being provided, those who do not have

a background in special education and limited exposure to special education-related content and experiences during their principal preparation programs may struggle as well. Although high levels of experience were reported, scores did not reflect participants' ability to implement knowledge and skills related to special education. This leads me to believe that *we don't know what we don't know* and participants' confidence levels may be higher because they do not realize the informal, on the job training may not have provided them with the correct knowledge and skills they require.

Conclusion

In order to prepare highly effective school administrators, it is essential that educational leadership programs provide instruction and experience on the critical components of the special education process. Prior to stepping foot in the door as the school's administrator, principals need to understand their role as special education leaders in their buildings and how to support their teams in providing SWD meaningful access to grade level curriculum. As DiPaola et al. (2004) indicated, instructional leaders must have enough knowledge of their practices to advocate for their students and on behalf of their teachers. If principal preparation programs are not going to adapt and update their curriculum, coursework, and internship activities to meet the changing needs of school administrators as special education leaders, these individuals may not have the knowledge **and** confidence needed to effectively support all students in their buildings. Principals may go elsewhere to gain the information they need, which may not always be accurate or timely (especially when going to other principals for information. As new research is conducted and the focus shifts from one component of special education to another, school administrators need to be up-to-date on the requirements of their role and

how to best support their special education students and teams. The results of this study show that professional development and on the job learning may not be enough to truly prepare administrators for a very complex and ever-changing role, as indicated by average scores on each of the scenarios.

Limitations

While the potential pool of participants was high (*n*= 837), the response rate for this study was 24%. Given a higher rate of response, there may have been more variability in the data, additional perspectives to incorporate, and a stronger representation of school administrators across the state of Idaho. The low response rate may make it difficult for transferability across future research and outside of the state. The small sample size and focus on only one state are also limitations to be considered. Idaho is a small, primarily rural state with pockets of suburban areas, so generalizing the findings of this research to more urban or suburban settings outside the state of Idaho may not provide the results the researcher is looking for.

Development of the survey instrument and rubric used in this study were carefully completed using current literature and input from special education experts in Idaho. Although the survey instrument was piloted with a group of previous school administrators, it was not validated through means beyond this small group or outside of the state of Idaho. Additionally, while the rubric and accompanying scores helped to identify the strengths, needs, and levels of understanding of Idaho's school administrators, the critical elements of each score may have been too focused. This may have led to scores that were lower or higher than expected for the information that was provided by the participants.

Another limitation to this research relates to a specific survey item. Survey item

six, which asked participants to choose all items that apply with regard to their previous

experience with individuals with disabilities, may have been confusing for some

participants. Five individuals answered this question and indicated they were previously a

special educator and had SWD in their general education classroom for one or more

years. The option to choose *I had SWD in my general education classroom for one or*

more years was intended to identify general educators who had experience teaching SWD

in their classroom, not as an additional option for former special educators to choose to

indicate they had SWD in their classrooms.

Recommendations

Active Learning and Experiences in Principal Preparation Programs

Given that the school administrators who participated in this study report they

learned more about special education outside of their graduate level coursework, it is

essential that principal preparation programs increase opportunities for learning in both

the classroom and clinical setting. Principal preparation programs should focus on

providing instruction on the *why* of special education and how school principals can

support their teams in ensuring SWD have meaningful access to general education

content and experiences with their typically-developing peers. In order for this shift to be

done in a sustainable manner, IHEs will need to identify what their core values are in

relation to educating all students, including SWD, and ensuring principals are prepared to

lead inclusive schools (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007). IHEs should build partnerships with

school districts to help future principals to translate theory to practice through internships

that are focused on understanding the full role of the administrator, not just the

components that pertain to general education supports (Sutcher et al., 2016). These partnerships may also provide IHEs with opportunities to have future principals mentored by district-level special education staff members, who can bridge the gap between coursework and practice.

Instead of focusing only on content at a procedural level, it is important that principal preparation programs provide future school principals with opportunity to learn about the role of the special education teacher and "the types of knowledge and skills demanded of effective special educators" (Steinbrecher et al., 2015, p.100). If a principal is familiar with what the role entails and what to expect from a strong special educator, they may be more successful in supporting their special educators and ensuring they have the resources necessary to provide high-quality educational opportunities to SWD. By including topics such as the importance of actively participating in IEP team meetings and building trusting relationships with special educators through attendance and participation in school based special education team meetings, school principals may build stronger relationships with their school's special educators, parents, and students. This could be done by developing special education-specific problem-based learning (PBL) and internship activities where learning and practice go hand in hand and provide "authentic opportunities for candidates to build mastery" (Sutcher, 2016, p. 12). Future principals would then be able to go through a PBL and apply the concepts or skills they have learned within their internship sites and activities. Coursework and experiences that focus on the characteristics, strengths and needs of disability categories, evidence-based instruction of students with disabilities, and effective supervision and evaluation practices will help principals to improve instruction and learning outcomes. A more intentional

focus on the foundation of special education in coursework and the experiences of special education in internships can provide future school administrators with a stronger start to their career as special education leaders.

School Administrator Professional Development

"To effectively meet the realities and challenges of their jobs in schools and districts, school leaders need relevant professional development throughout their careers" (Duncan, 2013, p. 296). Just as the state of Idaho requires a 3-credit course focusing on teacher evaluation, it is suggested that as part of administrator credential renewal, school principals should be required to participate in a course designed for special education topics for school administrators. Topics that should be included relate to each of the eight PD themes identified by participants: special education law, the special education process, special education eligibility, IEP development, supporting special education teachers, instructional practices for SWD, and supporting SWD in the general education environment. Because study participants also identified low levels of confidence in their ability to supervise and evaluate special educators, it will also be necessary for principals to participate in PD that is aligned to the state or district's teacher evaluation process. If this PD is provided by the school district, it will likely be in alignment with district processes and procedures and provide examples that support administrators' confidence in evaluating their special education teachers (Aramburo & Rodl, 2020). By structuring PD opportunities and aligning them to the areas of need determined by both research and current principals, the content will likely be more applicable and address the true needs of today's school administrators.

Knowing that a school principal's time is limited but the information they need is necessary, PD providers should also consider incorporating special education content into existing in-service opportunities and utilizing PD methodology that aligns to principals' preferences. Spanneut et al. (2012) found that P-12 principals preferred to attend workshops, participate in study groups with other principals and/or have a mentor or coach who could help them to learn and grow in their role, while Bizzell (2011) and Salazar (2018) found that because traveling to PD was a barrier for rural school principals, it was helpful to read articles, participate in book studies, and, with advance notice, participate in workshops or conferences that were ongoing and connected to school improvement goals.

Suggestions for Additional Research

Another layer of information could be added to this study by completing follow up research with study participants and asking them to share and expand on their knowledge, skills, and needs in the area of special education leadership. It would be interesting to have an opportunity to complete focus groups and/or individual interviews to gather additional information and hear from school administrators themselves.

This study included only P-12 school administrators from public school districts in the state of Idaho. Knowing that the certification requirements for school administrators who work in publicly-funded charters are different than those of P-12 district administrators, further research should focus on learning more about the special education-related knowledge and skills of school administrators who work in Idaho's public charter schools.

REFERENCES

Alkin, M. C. (1992). *Encyclopedia of educational research: Vol. 3*. pp. 22-29.Macmillan.

Angelle, P., & Bilton, Li. M. (2009). Confronting the unknown: Principal preparation
training in issues related to special education. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and
Practice*, *5*(4), 5–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-012370640-9/50002-8

Aramburo, C.M., & Rodl, J. (2020). Boosting school administrator confidence when
evaluating special educators through district support and training. *Journal of
School Administration Research and Development, 5*(2), 86-95.

Banda Roberts, M., & Guerra, F.R., Jr. (2017). Principals' perceptions of their knowledge
in special education. *Current Issues in Education, 20*(1), 1-17.
https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/1567

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change.
Psychological Review, 84(2), 191-215.

Baruch, Y., & Holtom, B. C. (2008). Survey response rate levels and trends in
organizational research. *Human Relations, 61*(8), 1139-1160. https://doi.org/
10.1177/0018726708094863

Bateman, D., & Bateman, C. F. (2014). *A principal's guide to special education.* Council
for Exceptional Children.

Bateman, D., Gervais, A., Wysocki, T. A., Cline, J. L. (2017). Special education
competencies for principals. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 30*(1), 48-
56.

Bays, D. A. (2001). *Supervision of special education instruction in rural public school
districts: A grounded theory* [Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University].

Bellibas, M. S., Gümüs, S., & Liu, Y. (2020, November 17-19). *How does principal leadership influence teachers' instructional quality: A structural equation model using TALIS 2013 dataset.* [Paper presentation]. University Council of Educational Administration Annual Convention.

Bettini, E. A., Cheyney, K., Wang, J., & Leko, C. (2015). Job design: An administrator's guide to supporting and retaining special educators. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 50*(4), 221-225. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451214532346

Billingsley, B., Carlson, E., & Klein, S. (2004). The working conditions and induction support of early career special educators. *Exceptional Children*, *70*(3), 333-347.

Bizzell, B.E. (2011). *Professional development of school principals in the rural Appalachian region of Virginia* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Virginia Tech University.

Boscardin, M. L., & Lashley, C. (2012). Expanding the leadership framework: An alternate view of professional standards. In J. B. Crockett, B. S. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (pp. 37-51). Routledge.

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Brownell, M. T., Smith, S. W., McNellis, J. R., & Miller, M. D. (1997). Attrition in special education: Why teachers leave the classroom and where they go. *Exceptionality*, 7(3), 143-155. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327035ex0703_1

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods.* Oxford University Press.

Christensen, J., Siegel Robertson, J., Williamson, R., & Hunter, W. C. (2013). Preparing educational leaders for special education success: Principals' perspectives. *The Researcher, 25*(1), 94-107.

Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Sage.

Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M.T., & Cohen, C. (2007) *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary leadership development programs.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

Darling-Hammond, L., Meyerson, D., LaPointe, M., & Orr, M. T. (2010). *Preparing principals for a changing world.* Jossey-Bass.

Davis, W. E. (1980). An analysis of principals' formal training in special education. *Education, 101*(1), 89-94.

DeMatthews, E., & Edwards, B. (2014). Preparing school leaders for special education: Old criticisms and new directions. *School Leadership Review*, *9*(1), 41-50. https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/slr/vol9/iss1/7

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method*. John Wiley.

DiPaola, M. F., & Hoy, W. K. (2012). *Principals improving instruction: Supervision, evaluation, and professional development.* Information Age Publishing, Inc.

DiPaola, M., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The principalship at a crossroads: A study of the conditions and concerns of principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, *87*(634), 43–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/019263650308763404

DiPaola, M., Tschannen-Moran, M., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2004). School principals and special education: Creating the context for academic success. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 37*(1), 1-11.

DiPaola, M. F., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2003). *Principals and special education: The critical role of school leaders.* (COPSSE Document No. IB-7E). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education.

Driscoll, M. P. (2000). *Psychology of learning for instruction*. Allyn and Bacon.

Duncan, H. (2013). Exploring gender differences in US school principals' professional development needs at different career stages. *Professional Development in Education, 39*(3), 293-311. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2012.722561

Edgar, E., & Pair, A. (2005). Special education teacher attrition: It all depends on where you are standing. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 28*(3/4), 163-170.

Education Commission of the States. (2018, April). *School leader certification and preparation programs: Which state entity approves traditional school leader preparation programs?* http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTANW?rep =SLC1802

Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 *et seq.* (1975).

Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1, 580 U.S. ___ (2017).

Fischhoff, B., Slovic, P., & Lichtenstein, S. (1977). Knowing with certainty: The appropriateness of extreme confidence. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance, 3*(4), 552-564.

Fisher, Y. (2014). The timeline of self-efficacy: Changes during the professional life cycle of school principals. *Journal of Educational Administration, 52*(1), 58-83. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-09-2012-0103

Fore, C., III., Martin, C., & Bender, W. N. (2002). Teacher burnout in special education: The causes and the recommended solutions. [Special Issue]. *The High School Journal, 86*(1), 36-44. http://www.jstor.com/stable/40364344

Frost, L. A., & Kersten, T. (2011). The role of the elementary principal in the instructional leadership of special education. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 6*(2), 1-21. http://cnx.org/content/m37402/1.2/

Garrison-Wade, D., Sobel, D., & Fulmer, C.L. (2007). Inclusive leadership: Preparing principals for the role that awaits them. *Exceptional Leadership and Administration, 19,* 117-132.

Guzmán, N. (1997). Leadership for successful inclusive schools: A study of principal behaviors. *Journal of Educational Administration, 35*(5), 439-450.

Hachiya, R.F., Shoop, R.J., & Dunklee, D.R. (2014). *The principal's quick-reference guide to school law* (3rd ed.). Corwin.

Heron, T.E., Goddard, Y.L., Tincani, M.J. (2003). Curriculum Considerations. In H. R. Weaver, M. F. Landers, T. M. Stephens, & E. A. Joseph (Eds.), *Administering special education programs: A practical guide for school leaders*. Praeger.

Hofreiter, D. (2017). *Principal preparation in special education: Building an inclusive culture* (Publication No. 10285190) [Doctoral dissertation, California State University-Long Beach]. ProQuest LLC.

Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley, 458 U.S. 176 (1982)

Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., & Dilig, R. (2020). *The Condition of Education 2020* (NCES 2020-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved 11/17/20 from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/ pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144.

Idaho State Department of Education. Federal Programs, Educator Effectiveness. (n.d.) *Teacher evaluation checklist. https://www.sde.idaho.gov/federal-programs/ed-effectiveness /files/effective-teachers/Teacher-Evaluations-Checklist.pdf*

Idaho State Department of Education. Professional Standards Commission. (2020). *Idaho standards for initial certification of professional school personnel: Idaho standards for school principals.* https://www.sde.idaho.gov /cert-psc/psc/standards.html

Idaho State Department of Education. Special Education Department (2018). *6-21 Child count 2018-2019* [Data set]. https://www.sde.idaho.gov/sped/public-reporting/

Idaho State Department of Education. Special Education Department (2019). *6-21 Child count 2019-2020* [Data set]. https://www.sde.idaho.gov/sped/public-reporting/

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004)

Jacob, R., & Jacob, B. (2012). Prenotification, incentives, and survey modality: An experimental test of methods to increase survey response rates of school principals. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 5*(4), 401-418. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/19345747.2012.698375

Jesteadt, L. (2012). Principals' knowledge of special education policies and procedures: Does it matter in leadership? [Doctoral dissertation, Florida Atlantic University].

Jimenez, T. C., & Graf, V. L. (2008). *Education for all: Critical issues in the education of children and youth with disabilities.* Jossey-Bass.

Johnson, E. S., Crawford, A., Moylan, L. A., Ford, J. W. (2016). Issues in evaluating special education teachers: Challenges and current perspectives. *Texas Education Review, 4*(1), 71-83.

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26. https://doi.org/10.3102.0013189X033007014

Johnston, W. R., & Young, C. J. (2019). *Principal and teacher preparation to support the needs of diverse students: National findings from the American Educator Panels.* RAND Corporation, RR-2990-BMGF.

Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence leads to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(6), 1121-1134. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/ 10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1121

Lasky, B., & Karge, B.D. (2006). Meeting the needs of students with disabilities: Experience and confidence of principals. *National Association of Secondary School Principals. NASSP Bulletin, 90*(1), 19-36.

Leithwood, K., & Levin, B. (2010). Understanding how leadership influences student learning. *International Encyclopedia of Education, 45-50.* https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.00439-5

Lundeberg, M.A., Fox, P.W., & Punćochar, J. (1994). Highly confident but wrong: Gender differences and similarities in confidence judgements. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 86*(1), 114-121.

Lynch, J.M. (2012). Responsibilities of today's principal: Implications for principal preparation programs and principal certification policies. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 31*(2), 40-47.

Marek, C. J. (2016). *Building principals' self-efficacy regarding their ability to supervise special education programming and staff*. [Master's Thesis] http://scholarworks. gvsu.edu/theses/820

McCarthy, M. M. (1999). The evolution of educational leadership preparation programs. In Murphy, J. & Louis, K. S., (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration. A project of the American Educational Research Association* (2nd ed., pp. 119-139). Jossey-Bass.

McHatton, P. A., Boyer, N. R., Shaunessy, E., Terry, P. M., Farmer, J. L. (2010). Principals' perceptions of preparation and practice in gifted and special education content: Are we doing enough? *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 5*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/194277511000500101

McLaughlin, M. J. (2009). *What every principal needs to know about special education* (2nd ed). Corwin Press.

Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. 866 (D.D.C. 1972).

Mitchell, C.G. (2011). *Common characteristics of school administrators who are perceived as effective in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.* [Doctoral dissertation, East Tennessee State University]. East Tennessee State University Digital Commons. https://dc.etsu.edu/etd

Nance, E., & Calabrese, R. L. (2009). Special education teacher retention and attrition: the impact of increased legal requirements. *International Journal of Educational Management, 23*(5), 431-440.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015). Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015. Author.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2018). National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Program Standards- Building Level. Retrieved from: www.npbea.org

Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership theory and practice* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.

Osborne, A. G., Russo, C. J., Lavoie, R. D., & Eckes, S. (2021). *Special education and the law: A guide for practitioners*. Corwin Press.

Osterman, K. F., & Hafner, M. M. (2009). Curriculum in leadership preparation: Understanding where we have been in order to know where we might go. In Young, M. D., Crow, G. M., Murphy, J., & Ogawa, R. T. (Eds.). *Handbook of research on the education of school leaders*. Routledge.

Patterson, J., Marshall, C., & Bowling, D. (2000). Are principals prepared to manage special education dilemmas? *NASSP Bulletin*, *84*(613), 9–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/019263650008461303

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Pazey, B. L., & Yates, J. R. (2012). Conceptual and historical foundations of special education administration. In J. B. Crockett, B. S. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (pp. 17-36). Routledge.

Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 343 F. Supp. 279 (E.D. Pa. 1972).

Praisner, C. L. (2003) Attitudes of elementary school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 69*(2), 135-145.

Prather-Jones, B. (2011). How school administrators influence the retention of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *The Clearing House, 84*(1), 1-8. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41149856

Ramirez, R. (2006). *Elementary principals' attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting*. [Doctoral dissertation, Baylor University].

Reames, E. (2010). Shifting paradigms: Redesigning a principal preparation programs curriculum. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 5(12),* 436-459. https://doi.org/10.1177/194277511000501205

Rodl, J. E., Bonifay, W., Cruz, R. A., & Manchanda, S. (2018). A survey of school administrators' training and support related to evaluating special education teachers. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 3*(1), 19-31.

Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 50*(1), 4-36. https://doi.org/ 10.3102/0002831212463813

Salazar, P.S. (2007). The professional development needs of rural high school principals: A seven-state study. *The Rural Educator, 28*(3), 20-27.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Schultz, P. A. (2011). *An examination of the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of effective school leaders of students with disabilities: Voices from the field* (Publication No. 3494745) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nevada-Las Vegas]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Sirotnik, K. A. & Kimball, K. (1994). The unspecial place of special education in programs that prepare school administrators. *Journal of School Leadership, 4, 598-630.*

Skaalvik, C. (2020). School principal self-efficacy for instructional leadership: Relations with engagement, emotional exhaustion and motivation to quit. *School Psychology of Education, 23,* 479-498. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09544-4

Sledge, A. S. (2014). Measuring teacher effectiveness through meaningful evaluation: How can reform models apply to general education and special education teachers. [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin].

Spanneut, G., Tobin, J., & Ayers, S. (2012). Identifying the professional development needs of public school principals based on the interstate school leader licensure consortium standards. *NASSP Bulletin, 96*(1), 67-68.

Staehr Fenner, D., Kozik, P., & Cooper, A. (2015). *Evaluating all teachers of english learners and students with disabilities.* Corwin.

Steinbrecher, T. D., Fix, R., Serna, L., McKeown, D., & Mahal, S. A. (2015). All you need is patience and flexibility: Administrators' perspectives on special educator knowledge and skills. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 28*(2), 89-102.

Stephens, T. M. & Nieberding, J. J. (2003). What do building administrators need to know about special education? In H. R. Weaver, M. F. Landers, T. M. Stephens, & E. A. Joseph (Eds.), *Administering special education programs: A practical guide for school leaders*. Praeger.

Sun, A.Q. & Xin, J.F. (2020). School principals' opinions about special education services. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth,* DOI: 10.1080/1045988X.2019.1681354

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Tashakkori, A. & Creswell, J. W. (2007). Editorial: The new era of mixed methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 3-7. https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906293042

Templeton, R. R. (2017). Special education leadership at the elementary school level: How does knowledge influence leadership? *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, *30*(1), 19–30.

Thurlow, M. L., Quenemoen, R. F., & Lazarus, S. S. (2012). Leadership for student performance in an era of accountability. In J. B. Crockett, B. S. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (pp. 3-16). Routledge.

Tracy, S.J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(10), 837-851.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2004). Principals' sense of efficacy: Assessing a promising construct. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*(5), 573-585. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230410554070

Villa, R. A., Thousand, J. S., Meyers, H., & Nevin, A. (1996). Teacher and administrator perceptions of heterogeneous education. *Exceptional Children, 63*(1), 29-45.

Waldron, N. L., McLeskey, J., & Redd, L. (2011). Setting the direction: The role of the principal in developing an effective, inclusive school. *Journal of Special Education Leadership, 24*(2), 51-60.

Weatherly, J. J. (2019, May 5). *Administrator boot camp: What LEA representatives need to know as IEP team "process leaders"* [Pre-Institute Symposium]. LRP's National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities, Orlando, FL, United States.

Westling, D. L., & Whitten, T. M. (1996). Rural special education teachers' plans to continue or leave their teaching positions. *Exceptional Children, 62*(4), 319-335.

Wilhoit, G. (2008) Educational leadership policy standards: ISLLC 2008 as adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

Willower, D. J., & Forsyth, P. B. (1999). A brief history of scholarship on educational administration. In J. Murphy & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration: A project of the American Educational Research Association,* (pp. 1-23). Jossey-Bass.

Yell, M. L., Rogers, D., & Rogers, E. L. (1998). The legal history of special education: What a long, strange trip it's been! *Remedial and Special Education, 19*(4), 219-228.

Yell, M. L., Thomas, S. S., Katsiyannis, A., (2010). Special education law for leaders and administrators of special education. In J. B. Crockett, B. S. Billingsley, & M. L. Boscardin (Eds.), *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education* (pp. 69-96). Routledge.

Zaretsky, L., Moreau, L., & Faircloth, S. (2008). Voices from the field: School leadership in special education. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 54*(2), 161-177.

APPENDIX A

Idaho Standards for School Principals

All administrator candidates are expected to meet standards specific to their discipline area(s) at the "acceptable" level or above. Additionally, all administrator candidates are expected to meet the requirements defined in State Board Rule (IDAPA 08.02.02: Rules Governing Uniformity). The following standards and competencies for school principals were developed based on widely recognized standards and are grounded in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) 2015, as adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. These standards are not all-encompassing or absolute but are indicative of the requirements necessary for effective school principals. The evidence validating candidates' ability to demonstrate these standards shall be collected from a variety of settings including, but not limited to, courses, practicum, and field experiences. It is the responsibility of higher education preparation programs to use knowledge and performance indicators in a manner that is consistent with its conceptual framework and that assures attainment of the standards.

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Beliefs - Effective school principals develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and beliefs of high-quality education and academic success, college and career readiness, and well-being of all students.

Knowledge

> 1(a) The school principal understands how to develop an educational mission for the school to promote the academic success and well-being of all students.

> 1(b) The school principal understands the importance of developing a shared understanding of and commitment to mission, vision, and beliefs within the school and the community.

1(c) The school principal understands how to model and pursue the school's mission, vision, and beliefs in all aspects of leadership.

Performance

1(d) The school principal participates in the process of using relevant data to develop and promote a vision for the school on the successful learning and development of all students.

1(e) The school principal articulates, advocates, and cultivates beliefs that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education.

1(f) The school principal strategically develops and evaluates actions to achieve the vision for the school.

1(g) The school principal reviews the school's mission and vision and makes recommendations to adjust them to changing expectations and opportunities for the school, and changing needs and situations of students.

Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms - Effective school principals act ethically and according to professional norms to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

2(a) The school principal understands ethical frameworks and perspectives.

2(b) The school principal understands the Code of Ethics for Idaho Professional Educators.

2(c) The school principal understands policies and laws related to schools and districts.

2(d) The school principal understands how to act according to and promote the professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement.

2(e) The school principal understands the importance of placing children at the center of education and accepting responsibility for each student's academic success and wellbeing.

Performance

2(f) The school principal acts ethically and professionally in personal conduct, relationships with others, decision-making, stewardship of the school's resources, and all aspects of school leadership.

2(g) The school principal leads with interpersonal and communication skills, social emotional insight, and understanding of all students' and staff members' backgrounds and cultures.

2(h) The school principal models and promotes ethical and professional behavior among teachers and staff in accordance with the Code of Ethics for Idaho Professional Educators.

Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness – School principals strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

3(a) The school principal understands how to recognize and respect all students' strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.

3(b) The school principal understands the need for each student to have equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, and academic and social support.

3(c) The school principal understands the importance of preparing students to live productively in and contribute to society.

3(d) The school principal understands how to address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.

3(e) The school principal understands how to ensure that all students are treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.

Performance

3(f) The school principal develops processes that employ all students' strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.

3(g) The school principal evaluates student policies that address student misconduct in a positive, fair, and unbiased manner.

3(h) The school principal acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice.

Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment - School principals develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

4(a) The school principal understands how to implement and align coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that promote the mission, vision, and beliefs of the school, embody high expectations for student learning, align with academic standards, and are culturally responsive.

4(b) The school principal understands how to promote instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of learning and development, effective teaching, and the needs of each student.

4(c) The school principal understands the importance of instructional practice that is intellectually challenging, authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths, and is differentiated and personalized.

4(d) The school principal understands how to utilize valid assessments that are consistent with knowledge of learning and development and technical standards of measurement. 4(e) The school principal understands how to ensure instruction is aligned to adopted curriculum and Idaho content standards including provisions for time and resources.

Performance

4(f) The school principal participates in aligning and focusing systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels and programs to promote student academic and career success.

4(g) The school principal uses and promotes the effective use of technology in the service of teaching and learning.

4(h) The school principal uses assessment data appropriately and effectively, and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction.

Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students - School principals cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of all students.

Knowledge

5(a) The school principal understands how to build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of all students.

5(b) The school principal understands how to promote adult-student, peer-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development.

5(c) The school principal understands the laws and regulations associated with special student populations.

5(d) The school principal understands various intervention strategies utilized to close achievement gaps.

5(e) The school principal understands essential components in the development and implementation of individual education programs, adhering to state and federal regulations.

Performance

5(f) The school principal participates in creating and sustaining a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community.

5(g) The school principal assists in designing coherent, responsive systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student.

5(h) The school principal cultivates and reinforces student engagement in school and positive student conduct.

Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel - School principals develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

6(a) The school principal understands how to recruit, hire, support, develop, and retain effective and caring teachers and staff.

6(b) The school principal understands how to plan for and manage staff turnover and succession, providing opportunities for effective induction and mentoring of new personnel.

6(c) The school principal understands how to develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community.

6(d) The school principal understands the importance of the personal and professional health of teachers and staff.

6(e) The school principal understands the Idaho adopted framework for teaching.

6(f) The school principal understands how to create individualized professional learning plans and encourage staff to incorporate reflective goal setting practices at the beginning of the school year.

6(g) The school principal understands how to foster continuous improvement of individual and collective instructional capacity to achieve outcomes envisioned for all students.

6(h) The school principal understands how to empower and motivate teachers and staff to the highest levels of professional practice and to continuous learning and improvement.

Performance

6(i) The school principal assists in developing teachers' and staff members' professional knowledge, skills, and practice through differentiated opportunities for learning and growth, guided by understanding of professional and adult learning and development.

6(j) The school principal delivers actionable feedback about instruction and other professional practice through valid, research-anchored systems of supervision and evaluation to support the development of teachers' and staff members' knowledge, skills, and practice.

6(k) The school principal increases their professional learning and effectiveness through reflection, study, and improvement, maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

6(l) The school principal utilizes observation and evaluation methods to supervise instructional personnel.

Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers - School principals foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

7(a) The school principal understands how to develop workplace conditions for teachers and other staff that promote effective professional development, practice, and student learning.

7(b) The school principal understands how to establish and sustain a professional culture of trust and open communication; collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement.

7(c) The school principal understands how to promote mutual accountability among teachers and other staff for each student's success and the effectiveness of the school as a whole.

7(d) The school principal understands how to encourage staff-initiated improvement of programs and practices.

Performance

7(e) The school principal assists in developing and supporting open, productive, caring, and trusting working relationships among teachers and staff to promote professional capacity and the improvement of practice.

7(f) The school principal designs and implements job-embedded and other opportunities for professional learning collaboratively with teachers and staff.

7(g) The school principal assists with and critiques opportunities provided for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning.

Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community – School principals engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

8(a) The school principal understands how to create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students.

8(b) The school principal understands and values the community's cultural, social, and intellectual, resources to promote student learning and school improvement.

8(c) The school principal understands how to develop and provide the school as a resource for families and the community.

8(d) The school principal understands the need to advocate for the school and district and for the importance of education, student needs, and priorities to families and the community.

8(e) The school principal understands how to build and sustain productive partnerships with the community to promote school improvement and student learning.

8(f) The school principal understands how to create means for the school community to partner with families to support student learning in and out of school.

8(g) The school principal understands how to employ the community's cultural, social, and intellectual resources to promote student learning and school improvement.

Performance

8(h) The school principal facilitates open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments.

8(i) The school principal demonstrates a presence in the community to understand its strengths and needs, develop productive relationships, and engage its resources for the school.

8(j) The school principal advocates publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the school community.

Standard 9: Operations and Management – School principals manage school operations and resources to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

9(a) The school principal understands how to institute, manage, and monitor operations and administrative systems that promote the mission and vision of the school.

9(b) The school principal understands how to strategically manage staff resources, assigning and scheduling teachers and staff to roles and responsibilities that optimize their professional capacity to address all students' learning needs.

9(c) The school principal understands how to seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; the student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement.

9(d) The school principal understands the need to be responsible, ethical, and accountable stewards of the school's monetary and non-monetary resources, engaging in effective budgeting and accounting practices.

9(e) The school principal understands how to employ technology to improve the quality and efficiency of operations and management.

9(f) The school principal understands how to comply and help the school community understand local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations so as to promote student success.

9(g) The school principal understands governance processes and internal and external politics toward achieving the school's mission and vision

9(h) The school principal understands laws and policies regarding school safety and prevention by creating a detailed school safety plan, which addresses potential physical and emotional threats.

9(i) The school principal understands the value of transparency regarding decision making and the allocation of resources.

9(j) The school principal understands how to institute, manage, and monitor operations and administrative systems that promote the mission and vision of the school.

9(k) The school principal understands how to protect teachers' and other staff members' work and learning from disruption.

9(l) The school principal understands how to develop and manage relationships with feeder and connecting schools for enrollment management and curricular and instructional articulation.

9(m) The school principal understands how to develop and manage productive relationships with the district office and school board.

9(n) The school principal understands how to develop and administer systems for fair and equitable management of conflict among students, teachers and staff, leaders, families, and community.

Performance

9(o) The school principal assists in managing staff resources, assigning and scheduling teachers and staff to roles and responsibilities that optimize their professional capacity to address each student's learning needs.

9(p) The school principal assists in seeking, acquiring, and managing fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; the student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement.

9(q) The school principal utilizes technology to improve the quality and efficiency of operations and management.

9(r) The school principal assists in developing and maintaining data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement.

9(s) The school principal complies with and helps the school community understand local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations so as to promote student success.

Standard 10: Continuous School Improvement – School principals act as agents of continuous school improvement to promote all students' academic success and well-being.

Knowledge

10(a) The school principal understands how to make school more effective for all students, teachers, staff, families, and the community.

10(b) The school principal understands methods of continuous improvement to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the beliefs of the school.

10(c) The school principal understands change and change management processes.

10(d) The school principal understands a systems approach to promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.

10(e) The school principal understands how to create and promote leadership among teachers and staff for inquiry, experimentation and innovation, and initiating and implementing improvement.

10(f) The school principal understands how to implement methods of continuous improvement to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the beliefs of the school.

10(g) The school principal understands how to manage uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives, and politics of change.

10(h) The school principal understands how to assess and develop the capacity of staff to evaluate the value and applicability of emerging educational trends and the findings of research for the school and its improvement.

10(i) The school principal understands how to promote readiness, instill mutual commitment and accountability, and develop the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed in improvement.

Performance

10(j) The school principal participates in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement.

10(k) The school principal analyzes situationally-appropriate strategies for improvement, including transformational and incremental, adaptive approaches and attention to different phases of implementation.

10(l) The school principal assists in developing appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation.

APPENDIX B

Final Survey

1. What is your current role?

   - Principal

   - Vice or Assistant Principal

2. What is your gender identity? (e.g., male, female, trans-female, etc.)

3. How long have you been a school administrator?

   - 0-1 year

   - 2-5 years

   - 6-9 years

   - 10-15 years

   - 16-20 years

   - 21+ years

4. What level of education do you currently work in?

   - Elementary

   - Middle School or Junior High

   - High School

   - K-12

   - Combination (please describe below)

5. *Use the map of Idaho's education regions above to answer the following question.*

Which educational region of the state is your school/district located in?

- Region 1

- Region 2

- Region 3

- Region 4

- Region 5

- Region 6

6. Prior to your role as a school administrator, what was your experience with students with disabilities? (*select all that apply*)

    - I had no experience with students with disabilities

    - I had students with disabilities in my general education class for one or more years

    - I was a special educator

    - I know someone outside of school with a disability

    - I am a parent of a child with a disability

7. To what extent do you participate in the following special education-related activities in your role as a school administrator? *(Not at all; 1 or more times/month; 1 or more times/week; Daily)*

    - Active participation in IEP meetings

    - Disciplining students with disabilities

    - Formal observation of students with disabilities

    - Provide guidance on instructional strategies for students with disabilities

    - Participation in school-based special education staff meetings

8. How did you learn the knowledge/skills associated with the following special education-related activities? *(Principal preparation program; Special education team member; Professional development activities; On the job; Personal experience outside of the school setting; I have never learned how to do this)*

- Facilitate IEP meetings

- Disciplining students with disabilities

- Formal observation of students with disabilities

- Provide guidance on instructional strategies for students with disabilities

- Participation in school-based special education staff meetings

9. If you could choose special education-related topics for school administrator professional development, what topic(s) would you suggest?

10. How confident do you **currently** feel about your special education-related knowledge and skills? *(Not at all confident; Somewhat confident; Moderately confident; Very confident)*

11. *Drag and drop items from the column on the left to the box on the right in order of priority.*

As a school administrator, I believe the 3 most important things to know about special education are:

- Components of special education law including timelines and requirements

- Supervision/Evaluation of special education teachers

- All students with disabilities have meaningful access to general education content

- Identifying services and the Least Restrictive Environment

- How to support special education teachers and related service providers in their roles

- Discipline of students with disabilities

- How to read and understand an IEP

- Helping students with disabilities to meet grade-level expectations alongside peers

- How to facilitate an IEP meeting

12. Please read the following scenarios and respond to each:

(1) A parent of a 2nd grade student calls you to voice their concerns about a student in their child's class who is disruptive and not allowing their child to learn (or the teacher to teach). They tell you the student's name is Ella, which was given to them by their own child, and ask that the child be removed from the classroom. You are familiar with Ella and recognize that she currently receives special education services in your school.

Explain how you would respond to the parent and how you would address the parent's

concern with Ella's teacher(s).

(2) As the school administrator, you attend an IEP meeting for Bo, a 7th grade student who receives special education services for a specific learning disability (SLD) in reading. The IEP team discusses Bo's progress in class and toward his annual IEP goals. Bo's general education teachers state he is a kind kid and seems to be trying his best. However, his performance is in the bottom quarter in each of their classes. Bo's special education teacher reviews Bo's progress toward his goal (you may assume the goal is appropriate). Bo has not met his reading goal this year or the past two times his IEP has been reviewed. While he has improved as a reader, over the past three years the discrepancy between his performance and his peers' performance has grown, according to progress monitoring and assessment results.

Bo's general education teachers are concerned that the work in their classes may be too difficult for him because of his disability. Bo's special education teacher is open to suggestions. She states that currently, she helps Bo with his classwork, reminds him to turn in his assignments, and works with his general education teachers to apply his accommodations to class assignments and testing. She is frustrated and doesn't know what else to do. Bo's parents are very concerned about the data that shows Bo falling farther behind his peers. They want to know what can be done and they are still a little confused on the purpose of special education. They ask, what does it mean to claim Bo needs special education? He doesn't appear to need what is being provided if he's falling farther behind.

In your response, explain how you would answer Bo's parents. Also explain what you would say to Bo's general and special education teachers given their comments regarding Bo, his progress, his needs, and his disability.

APPENDIX C

Pilot Survey

1. What is your current role?

2. How long have you been a school administrator?

- 0-1 year

- 2-5 years

- 6-9 years

- 10-15 years

- 16-20 years

- 21+ years

3. What level of education do you currently work in?

- Elementary

- Middle School or Junior High

- High School

- K-12

4. *Use the map of Idaho's educational regions above to answer the following question.*

Which educational region of the state is your school/district located in?

- Region 1

- Region 2

- Region 3

- Region 4

- Region 5

- Region 6

5. Prior to your role as a school administrator, what was your experience with students with disabilities? (*select all that apply*)

- I had no experience with students with disabilities

- I had students with disabilities in my general education class for one or more years

- I was a special educator

- I know someone outside of school with a disability

6. To what extent do you participate in the following special education-related activities in your role as a school administrator? *(Not at all; 1 or more times/month; 1 or more times/week; Daily)*

- Facilitate IEP meetings

- Disciplining special education students

- Observing special education students (inside or outside of classroom)

- Provide guidance on instructional strategies for students with disabilities

- Participation in special education staff meetings

7. How did you learn the knowledge/skills associated with the following special education-related activities?

- Facilitate IEP meetings

- Disciplining special education students

- Observing special education students (inside or outside of classroom)

- Provide guidance on instructional strategies for students with disabilities

- Participation in special education staff meetings

- Other

8. If you chose "other" for any items on the last question, how did you learn the information?

9. How confident do you currently feel about your special education-related knowledge and skills? (*Not at all confident; Somewhat confident; Moderately confident; Very confident*)

10. Drag and drop the items from the bottom on the left to the box on the right in order of priority. As a school administrator, I believe the 3 most important things to know about special education are:

- Components of special education law including timelines and requirements

- Supervision of special education teachers

- Evaluation of special education teachers

- Understanding Least Restrictive Environment

- Discipline of special education students

- How to read and understand an IEP

- How to facilitate an IEP meeting

APPENDIX D

Participant Recruitment Email

Greetings,

My name is Whitney Schexnider, and I am a graduate student at Boise State University. I am conducting a research study to gather information from current school administrators regarding the special education knowledge and skills they have and how they learned the information. The information gleaned from this survey will help to inform both preservice graduate programs and in-service professional development for school administrators.

If you are interested, please click on the link for the survey and additional information: www.linktosurvey.com.

As part of your voluntary participation in this survey, you may provide your name and email address to be entered to win one of six $50 Visa gift cards for your school's special education program. Names and email addresses will not be used for any purpose other than to notify the winners.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (whitneyschexnider@u.boisestate.edu) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Julianne Wenner (juliannewenner@boisestate.edu).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Whitney Schexnider

Graduate Student

Boise State University

APPENDIX E

Survey Cover Page

Understanding Principals' Knowledge of Special Education

Whitney Schexnider, a graduate student at Boise State University, is conducting a research study to gather information from current school administrators regarding the special education knowledge and skills they have and how they learned the information. You are being asked to complete this survey because you are a current school principal or vice principal in Idaho. The results will help to inform both educational leadership programs and in-service professional development for school administrators.

Participation is voluntary. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

As part of your voluntary participation in this survey, you may choose to provide your name and email address to be entered to win one of six $50 Visa gift cards for your school's special education program. Names and email addresses will not be used for any purpose other than to notify the winners.

This study involves no foreseeable serious risks. Your response to the survey will be kept confidential. You must be at least 18 years old to take this survey.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Whitney or her faculty advisor:

Whitney Schexnider, Graduate Student
Curriculum, Instruction & Foundational Studies
(208) 391-1811
whitneyschexnider@u.boisestate.edu

Dr. Julianne Wenner, Assistant Professor
Curriculum, Instruction & Foundational Studies
(208) 426-1615
juliannewenner@boisestate.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Boise State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the board office between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, by calling (208) 426-5401 or by writing: Institutional Review Board, Office of Research Compliance, Boise State University, 1910 University Dr., Boise, ID 83725-1138.

If you would prefer not to participate, please do not fill out the survey.

If you consent to participate, please complete the survey.

APPENDIX F

Professional Development Themes

Special Education Law

- Law

- Compliance

Special Education Process

- Principal's role

- The "why"

- Child Find

- Referral, Response to Intervention

- Free Appropriate Public Education

Special Education Eligibility

- Eligibility reports

- Eligibility process

- Disability categories

- Evaluation

IEP Development

- Components of the IEP

- IEP meetings (role, meeting notes)

- Least Restrictive Environment

- Accommodations and adaptations

- IEP team members

- Timeline

Supporting Special Education Teachers

- Supervision/evaluation

- When and how to support in an IEP meeting

- Professional development

- How to support when students have high needs

- Teacher workload

- Working with the special education team

Instruction

- Success in general education

- Grading

- Instructional strategies

- Instruction in core subjects

- Meeting grade level expectations

- Differentiation

General Education

- Collaboration with special education

- Supporting to meet needs of students with disabilities

- Implementation of the IEP

- Inclusion

- Access to general education content

- Monitoring IEP goals

Other

- English Learners and special education

- Trauma

- Sensory

- Universal Design for Learning

APPENDIX G

Rubric for Scenarios

(1) Unsatisfactory	(2) Basic	(3) Proficient	(4) Exemplary
Suggestions include decrease in overall expectations due to student's disability, adults will make adjustments to make things easier and/or no changes to be made	Suggestion includes decrease in one or more expectations for the student	Statement that concerns are likely due to a combination of student needs/skills and teacher implementation of the IEP	Articulation of the need for high expectations in order to make progress towards general education standards, closing the achievement gap
Statement that student is in special education because of their needs	Concerns are likely due to student's skills; student is making a choice	General explanation that SDI is based on the needs of the student and the IEP helps to define what is taught; SDI helps student move closer to grade level and/or access grade level content	Detailed explanation that SDI is based on unique needs of the student, teaches specific skills and provides access to general education curriculum; provides student-specific examples; instruction should be individualized
Suggestion that student may no longer be eligible due to lack of progress	Explanation that the student is accessing special education to move closer to grade level, no mention of specially designed instruction (SDI)	Suggestion to review data or conduct an observation	Suggestion to discuss current EBPs in use, review how instruction is implemented
Suggestions or guidance focus on what is easiest for the student, staff, and/or peers	Suggestion that teacher could change practice	Suggestion to review the IEP or BIP; teacher(s) should/will review their own practices	Use of data, observations, and/or grade-level curriculum to make instructional and programmatic decisions
Principal provides direction as to what changes will be made without input from IEP team members	Suggestion that they will look at the data or review the plan	Principal will follow up with IEP team about what should happen next	Team will review IEP and/or BIP
Student confidentiality is not maintained	Principal defers to the "experts" on the team or works independently to solve the issue	Student confidentiality is maintained	Principal advocates for the IEP team to discuss issues together, provides suggestions based knowledge of the student
and/or	Student confidentiality is maintained		Student confidentiality is maintained
Not enough information to demonstrate knowledge of special education practices			

APPENDIX H

Prior Experience with SWD

	SWD in my general education classroom	Was a special educator	Know someone outside of school with a disability	Parent of a child with a disability
1	x		x	x
2	x		x	
3	x			x
4	x		x	
5		x		x
6	x		x	
7	x		x	
8	x		x	x
9	x		x	
10	x		x	
11	x		x	
12	x			x
13	x		x	
14	x		x	x
15	x		x	x
16	x		x	
17	x	x	x	
18	x	x		
19	x	x		
20	x		x	
21	x		x	
22	x			x
23	x		x	
24	x			x
25	x		x	
26	x	x		
27	x		x	
28	x	x		
29	x	x		
30	x		x	
31	x		x	x
32	x		x	
33	x		x	
34	x		x	
35	x			x
36	x			x
37	x		x	x

	SWD in general education classroom	Special Educator	Know someone outside of school with a disability	Parent of a child with a disability
38	x		x	x
39	x		x	x
40	x		x	
41	x		x	
42	x			x
43	x		x	
44	x		x	x